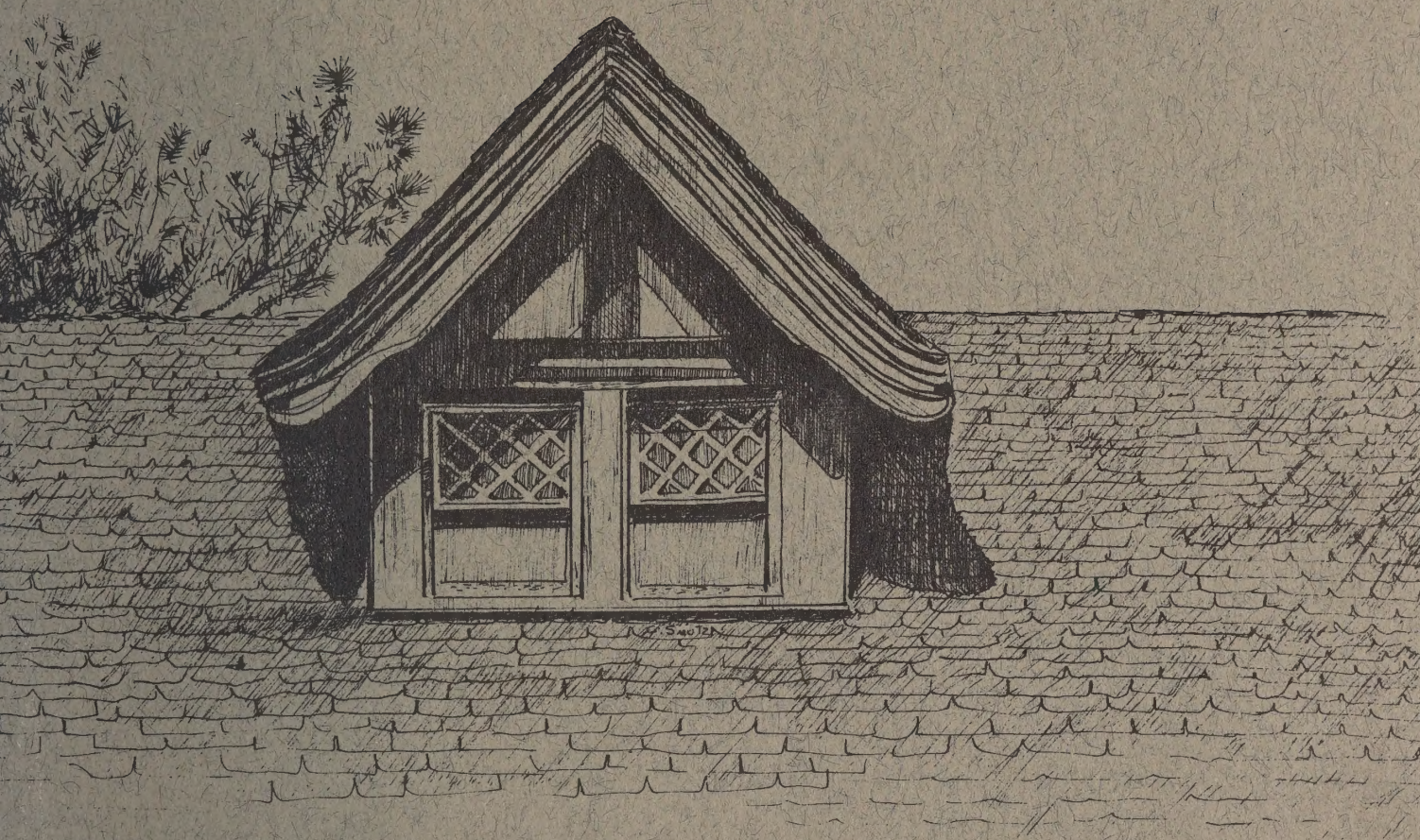

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Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
1997

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Third Issue

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1997

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Cover drawing by Constance M. Smutz of a window in the Sunnicrest Building.

Photo by Olin Wood

On the Wing

Fred Chappell

Through plexiglass abraded to a mist of rainbows
I observe the motor housing five feet away.
Its underside reflects the airline logo,
Red and yellow, as the bullet shape pulls forward.

The black propeller cone possesses a shadow
That I interpret as the whirling propeller,
The invisible screw that tightens me turn by turn
Against the destination my ticket foretells.

All below, the usual human evidence:
Fields plowed beige, black roads through forests, barns
And parking lots. From twenty thousand feet
That landscape is idyllic, the one imagined
Four generations past and then preserved
In the book in the musty armoire seldom opened.

The wing of riveted plates sweeps over the land,
Trolling its shadow for a farmer's upward glance.
I am contained in this shadow that cuts across the fields,
The cars and waters, but can see no shadow myself,
Being so securely removed by height
And the second glass of bourbon. Whatever fancies
I entertain of air or earth are rebuked
By the central wingplate's painted instruction.
NO STEP, it says, as if expecting me to take one.

Caring,

Sharing,

Loving,

Cajoling,

I am,

You are,

Teacher

And Student,

We both

ARE.

Teresa Dee Kennedy
1996-1997 Instructor of the Year
Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

Dancing with Ginger

Peggy Higgins

His teeth were outlined in gold, the way sunlight outlines a gray cloud. They were the first things I noticed when he leaned forward across our shared dinner table and smiled largely at me. The second were his neon blue irises, glowing hotly amid the pink-veined whites of eyes permanently bloodshot. Then his mouth opened, and a landslide of Russian words overlaid with vodka fumes rolled over me and mowed down my own carefully prepared stock of phrases the way a bush hog clears out an overgrown woodlot. The one thing that needed no translation was the smile. I returned it at only half-wattage, not knowing what I might be tacitly agreeing to with only a facial expression. Other vacationing Russians at nearby tables, seeing my predicament, (and wanting to practice their own English) leaned toward us cosily and translated.

"Alexei Andreyovich wants to know are you married," explained one, his face bathed in goodwill and sweat.

Thinking my dinner companion had not noticed the ring on my left hand, I nodded and replied, "Da, da."

"Why, then, do you travel alone?" was the next thrust.

I parried with an attempt to explain my temporary job as visiting English instructor at the local university in Sochi. They all looked at me: volunteer translators, my table companion, and anyone else within hearing range with a passing acquaintance of English, with equal mixtures of pity and disbelief.

"Why your husband does not worry about you?" My table mate persisted, a la go-between.

"Why should he?" I countered. "The sanitorium is protected by walls and a gate, and should I not feel safe in Sochi?"

What could he, or they, say? Russia--in its former incarnation as the USSR and now in its 1992 Russia persona--had prided itself on low crime rates, especially when compared to its former foe--the US. But my compliment to the Motherland was taken for what it was, a holding action until I could decently abandon the monochromatic food on my plate and exit through the 1960s-style modern doors of the multi-level Sanitoria Zapolaria dining hall. Diverted from a frontal assault, my new acquaintances focused on my eating habits; I wasn't doing enough eating and, by unspoken rebuke, was wasting superior quality food.

"I ate a large lunch," I explained, weakly, even to my own ears.

More disapproving looks overlaid with smiles, but at least it gave me a way to escape. I avoided the dining hall for the next few days, drinking pots of Earl Grey in my room and wolfing down caviar sandwiches at the little coffee shop near school. But my private stash of tea couldn't last forever and neither could my supply of rubles, and, besides, my Scottish soul balked at the thought that I wasn't taking advantage of the meals I was entitled to (no matter how bad). In a week I was planning forays back into the public eating arena with an eye toward avoiding my assigned table companion. At least, I thought, I could sneak in early and grab a couple of rolls, maybe a grayish meatball with what passed for mashed potatoes. It was amazing how the passage of time (and some healthy hunger pangs) turned a formerly unappetizing menu into something I looked forward to with mouth-watering anticipation.

No sooner did I slip--what I thought was unobtrusively--into my chair at the table than I saw Alexei Andreyovich appear in the doorway at the far end of the dining room. Our eyes met and quickly slid away as we spotted each other across the masticating crowd. I had a wild urge to grab what food I could from the table and make a break for it, but, before I could carry out my desperate plan, I looked back toward the door and saw my nemesis ducking back down the steps. Amazing! He wanted to avoid contact as much as I did. But, rather than feeling relieved, I felt guilty. How to fix the problem, allowing my tablemate to eat his meals in peace, and, at the same time, saving myself from unintelligible advances?

The next afternoon, as I walked back to my room after class, I saw Alexei Andreyovich strolling along the sidewalk ahead of me. On an impulse, I put on a short burst of speed and overtook him, slowing down just in time to make it seem, I hoped, as though the encounter were by chance. I smiled as casually as I could manage and said, "Dobriy dyenny," hoping he would think it a good afternoon, too. Again, the sun-breaking-through-the-clouds smile as he returned, "Good afternoon."

Great, I thought, friendly, but not too friendly. He should take the hint and I can go back to the dining room without looking over my shoulder all the time.

It was with relief that I sat down at my usual table that evening. I was just working my way through a plate of what looked like ground beef and red cabbage when Alexei Andreyovich pulled out the chair across from me and sat down.

As he leaned toward me, I noticed something clutched in the sausage-like fingers of his right hand. It didn't look like a weapon, but I eyed him suspiciously all the same. He placed the hand carefully on the table next to my plate, and when he withdrew it, there on the gravy-stained cloth lay a gleaming white egg, a peace offering that needed no translation. The question he asked, however, did. The only thing I caught from the stream of vaguely English sounding words was some reference to "cinema."

"I beg your pardon," I said.

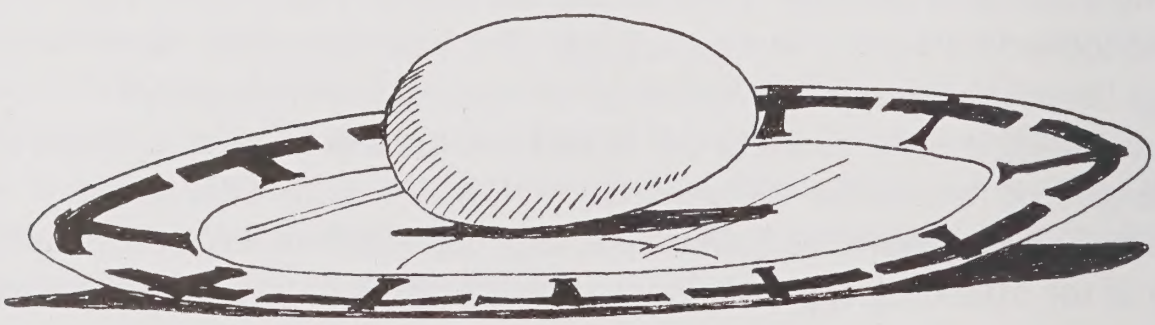
"You like go to American cinema tonight?" he repeated with painstaking slowness.

I could see I faced a double dilemma: how to handle an unwanted gift and an unwanted invitation without turning a shared dining table into a Cold War zone. I was mentally scrabbling for a solution to those problems. I was also more than a little annoyed that my would-be suitor thought he could win my affections so cheaply. Even during the war, so I had heard, a girl could have looked forward to some stockings or at least chocolate. Since when had eggs become an acceptable exchange for an evening's company? Fortunately, it wasn't hard to call in that last-ditch defense so beloved by beleaguered females from Manhattan to Minsk. I really DID have a headache. I explained as I simultaneously deposited my crumpled napkin on top of the offending egg and slithered out of my chair on my bee-line path

toward the door and freedom. Like Scarlett O'Hara, an early heroine of mine, I'd think about a way out of the predicament "tomorrow."

I fled the dining hall and speed walked up the path, out the gate past the bored gatekeeper and caught the next bus into downtown Sochi, where I found an unoccupied table at my old standby coffeehouse and gratefully dug into a plate of caviar sandwiches washed down by strong, sweet Turkish coffee. By the time I finished eating, I had a plan. Luckily, the groundwork was already laid for my permanent escape. I would simply plead a heavy workload: essays, tests to grade, whatever I needed to build a paperwork safety barrier around me until Alexei Andreyovich's vacation was over and he returned to whatever gulag he had come from.

I was in a much better mood waiting for the bus returning to the Sanitoria Zapolaria than I had been when I departed there less than two hours before. I would be free without international incident! I floated down the hill, through the gate and into my building, hardly noticing my surroundings at all. That is, until I got to the television alcove on the hall where my room was located. At first, I thought it was deserted because all the lamps were dark. Then I noticed the moon-like glow from the television screen, playing to an audience of one. Alexei Andreyovich sat mesmerized by the fluid movements of Fred Astaire as he glided across the screen. Then, while I watched but tried not to watch, the Russian rose from his seat and began wildly spinning and turning across the small square of linoleum, a lonely Fred dancing with a phantom Ginger. I don't think he heard the small click as I unlocked my door and ducked into my room. I never saw him again, and I've never again seen an egg of such gleaming whiteness as the one he placed so carefully beside my plate.



Drawing by Richard Croom

Seasons

Lee Ann Hodges

I will say good-bye to summer's
heat upon my back; and
I can say good-bye to tastes of
sweet, new-fallen apples, warm from
basking in sunrays. I'll look over my
shoulder at rusty bikes and swings that
stiffen in joints unused.

I can even welcome autumn
with its changing colors, dreadful
shedding. These can I accept and even
find a certain pleasure in. But
do not ask me to open my
arms to winter, cov'ring all with
false softness, cov'ring bones of
trees stripped clean of flesh.

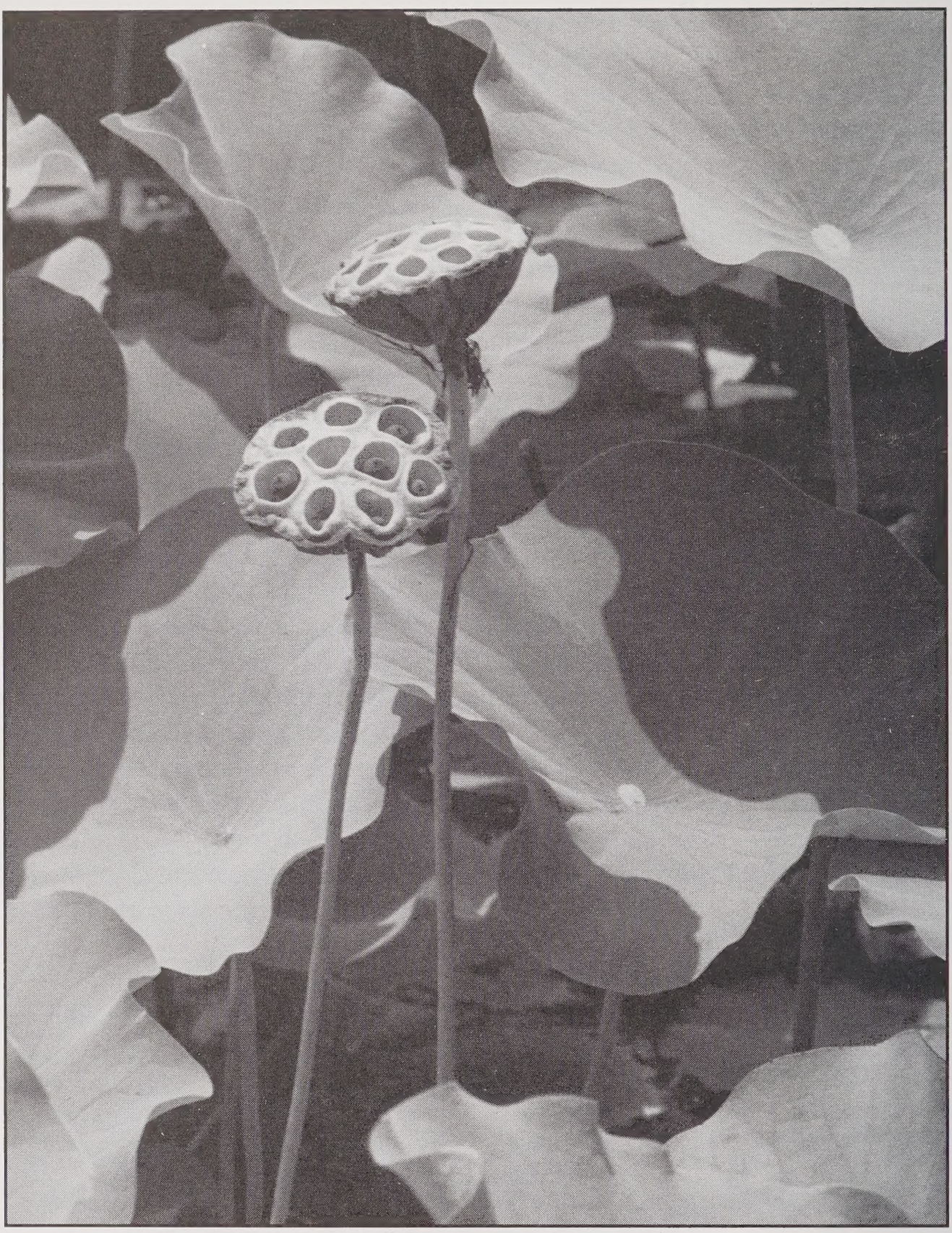


Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

The Atheist's Garden

Tom Rash

Up until 1975, when I went off to college and she went back to teaching, my mother almost always got up one hour before the rest of us to fix a country breakfast of eggs, bacon, biscuits, and oatmeal, a reassuring ritual signaled each morning by the pre-dawn rattling of pots and pans. The days, then, when this routine was broken, were few but noteworthy, for coming down to cold cereal meant that my mother was either very sick or very angry.

And so it was that on a warm spring morning during my junior year in high school I came down to Shredded Wheat and the realization that all was not right in my world. My mom said nothing to me, my brother, or my sister. We all sat down, uneasy and wary. The tension in the room was enough to make me not want to eat, and, adding to this feeling, was the unsweetened, strawlike cereal that lay in soggy lumps in my bowl.

The minutes before my dad appeared dragged on as we became more and more aware of our own chewing and swallowing. Finally, I could take it no more. "Hey Mom," I said from behind the box, "did the government grant us grazing rights for this stuff?" No reply, just a cold stare and a slight turn of the head.

To everyone's relief, Dad finally shuffled up the steps, head down, typically oblivious to anything that was not to be eaten or read. His socks were different colors, and the sole of his right shoe flapped open, almost like a second mouth positioned to catch the crumbs that fell as he tried to read and eat at the same time. My mom clearly wanted my dad to notice her frustration, but this was asking too much of a man who would do anything (including feigning deafness) to avoid confrontation and dispute.

As usual, no one mentioned my dad's absentminded assembly of brown pants, green shirt, and purple tie, colors seen together only on certain Amazonian reptiles. He made a mumbling, resigned move for the door. Three seconds moreand he would have been on his way to his usual counter seat at the Snak Shak, the restaurant whose B sanitation rating warded off my mom like a plague cross. But my mom's voice was too urgent to ignore.

"Jim," my mom intoned, " I'm going to cancel the newspaper today."

"Why, honey?" my father halfheartedly asked, his hopes for coffee and a fried apple pie now dashed.

"Because," my mom sputtered, "they have gone too far this time. This is Freeman's third letter in three months, and I cannot believe that the editor, a deacon at First Baptist in Shelbyville, would allow the ranting of this godless man to be printed for every young person in the county to see."

At first my dad merely nodded at my mother. However, when my mom started jabbing at the editorial page in a wordless tirade, Dad began to try to calm her down. And she did calm down, for it was not in her generally agreeable nature to be too hard on people. Her dark mood lifted slowly, however.

When the morning's drama had ended and my hungry and subdued father had gone off to teach, I came back downstairs to see if I could find the letter that had so upset my mom. Surprisingly, the paper was still on the table. I quickly and quietly turned to the editorial page and scanned the letters to the editor. I stopped at the heading "Atheist Questions God's Justice" and read:

> Last Thursday, May 14, a series of powerful storms rumbled through the Carolinas. In one small town a tornado touched down, destroying a mobile home and killing the family inside, including a little girl of three. My question to all of the Christians in Shelbyville is where was god on May 14? On May 14 did god lose control of his creation? If so, he is not omnipotent and cannot be god. If, however, he was in control and just decided on that day that an innocent child would die, then he is far from the omnibenevolent being of Christian mythology.
>
> Almost to a person, the Christians that I have met have been incapable of answering the hard questions of their faith. If the death of this girl was not a capricious, callous and cruel act, then what was it? An act of love? Of mercy? Long ago I gave up believing in god, primarily because I realized that to do so was to escape life's many troubles by thinking only of what is to be and not what is and to miss what is beautiful and good about life. We must, I feel, live honest lives, accepting that life is a struggle and that we persevere nevertheless. "Cultivate your garden," the great French atheist said; I choose to do just that.

I slowly reread the letter and, dazed, went upstairs to finish getting ready for school. The letter troubled me all day. I couldn't stop thinking about what I had never before dare imagine: a world with no God. For sixteen years I had lived in the certainty of a solidly Christian home, and now all that I had taken for granted had been called into question. Most troubling for me was the nature of my mom's belief. She and her faith were inseparable; she seemed as certain of God as I was that one heartbeat would follow another.

To compound my problems, I had recently, and belatedly, begun dating, thus deepening the mystery of a life that, just months before, was carefree and simple. For a month now, I had been trying to get up the nerve to ask Jenny Ross out to eat and to play Putt Putt, an activity with which, unlike dancing, I felt I actually might

be able to impress her. The problem was that Jenny was an old friend, and I was afraid to cross that confusing line between dating and just getting together, fearing that a night of nervous, ill-timed laughter and uncomfortable silences would humiliate us both.

But, try as I might, during hours of pacing rehearsal, I could not convince myself not to do it. The receiver slipped in my clammy hand when I finally brought it to my ear. At first, I could hear only my rushing blood when I tilted my head towards the earpiece. I was saved from total panic by a reassuringly friendly "hello." We talked for a few minutes, and I found myself once again charmed by Jenny's lilting voice.

Too soon, however, I snapped back to the scary reality of the moment and half-blurted out something about pizza and Putt-Putt on Friday night. She laughed and said sure, but then asked who else would be going. "No one else," I stammered. She was quiet for too long. My hand began trembling. What was she thinking? Was I assuming too much? Perhaps she had never thought of me as anything but a good friend, someone to shoot ball with, to borrow records from, to hang around the Snak Shak with, playing the same worn records over and over on the barely audible juke box. But then she asked me what time she should be ready, words she had never spoken quite like that before.

After hanging up the phone I went downstairs to join my father in the den. Although the TV was on, my father was, as usual, deep into a book. His large oak desk was stacked a foot high with tests, grade books, slides, and art books. The pile had the solidity of a New England stone fence; the papers and books never fell, no matter how absentmindedly my father searched through them. Entering conversation with him at such times was not easy; my mom had given up years before and now contented herself with a morse code of short and long grunts. Tonight, however, I was content to sit in silence, as my father contemplated the glories of ancient Greece and I, the mysteries of God and girls.

The week dragged by, but Friday, when it finally came, brought surprising concerns. For the first time in my life I worried about how I smelled. I couldn't decide how liberally to splash on the Brut cologne that had sat unopened on my dresser since last Christmas. And I combed my hair several different ways before deciding that all I had to do was make sure that my oversized ears were hidden.

By the time I reached Jenny's door, however, I had come to dread her dad's small talk more than anything else about the evening. Whereas my dad mumbled his way through his days, Mr. Ross spoke crisply, snapping off his words like the rap of a teacher's ruler. He was a humorless engineer who was much given to dispensing career advice with an aphoristic ease. Mr. Ross knew my father, but the two were so different that their conversations always made me think of cheap

horror films and the futile efforts of the conscientious man of science to talk to the alien who is only a few minutes away from eating its first human.

Tonight, thankfully, Mr. Ross was preoccupied with some plumbing problem and gave only a perfunctory greeting as he waved me to the couch and went back into the kitchen to continue his labors. I had expected Jenny to be right behind her father, but was surprised to hear that she would be down in a minute. I began to worry that I had, as usual, not made myself clear, and that Jenny would come sweeping down the stairs in a prom dress. The effect, however, when she did step quietly into the room could not have been greater if she had been wearing a formal gown, for her light-blue sundress, white sandals, gold necklace and earrings were iridescent against her brown hair, eyes, and skin. It was the first time that I had seen her wear make-up, and, as she said "hello," I caught the first hint of her perfume.

My intoxication only heightened when she turned her back and I saw the square of tanned skin framed by the cut in her dress. I almost reached out to touch the gentle curve of her shadowed shoulder blades but was abruptly snapped to by Mrs. Ross's "Have a good time, you two. Be back by eleven." My reverie broken, I followed Jenny out to the car, both confused and aroused by a girl I'd last seen wearing cut-offs and shooting basketball.

Jenny tried to make small talk, but I was too numb to reply. I drove on into the cooling spring night unsure of how to break the embarrassing silence. I could think of nothing else to do except to concentrate intently on my driving.

As we slowed at the junction of highways 21 and 18, however, Jenny stirred. I perked up, too, hoping to encourage any comment that might break the interminable silence. When she did speak, I was so intent on her words that I did not understand what she had said. I asked her to repeat it. "Isn't that the atheist's garden?" she asked. "You know, the man who writes those strange letters to the paper." For a few seconds it just didn't make sense. I had ridden by this garden hundreds of times and, more than once, had heard someone comment on its varied flowers, fruits, and vegetables. "The nicest garden in the county," a friend's parent had once said, and, looking closely at the garden, as I now did for the first time, it was easy to see how someone could believe that. The luxuriant, multicolored plants flowed down the gentle slope of the hill, yet, within this lushness, there was also order, imposed through the strict geometry of a series of fences and wires.

This whole night was rapidly overwhelming me. To my confused feelings for Jenny were now added further questions about the atheist gardener and my mom's unshakable faith. The more I thought the more the paradox grew. How could a man who scorned God have the nicest garden in the county, possibly in the state? As we entered Shelbyville's city limits, I found myself squinting to read the small sign that pointed to the restaurant, almost as if some clue might be found, or even an answer, perhaps, to just one of the many questions now confronting me.

I almost stumbled going around to open Jenny's door. She noticed that I was distracted and asked if something were bothering me. I didn't want her to think that I regretted asking her out, so I smiled and joked that I was weak with hunger. Once inside, it did not take long for Jenny's good-natured humor to lighten my mood. I forgot the troubling garden long enough to enjoy the meal and the three games of Putt-Putt we later played. On the way home, however, as we passed the dark garden, my small talk became almost urgent as I tried to ward off the disturbing questions its existence raised. We got to Jenny's house none too soon, for I wanted nothing more than to get back to the restless seclusion of my room. I don't think that I would have tried to kiss Jenny that first night anyway, but it was now out of the question. I walked her to the door, said goodnight, and turned to walk away. "Goodnight, I had fun," she almost whispered. "Goodnight," I replied. But I could not bear to turn and look at her.

I managed to get through the next few weeks, although thoughts of God, Mom, the atheist and his garden, and Jenny continually mingled, distracting me so much that my parents and teachers thought that I might be sick. And I was, after all, sick, both of finding myself suddenly facing certain questions with a deathbed urgency and of not talking with Jenny simply because I couldn't stand to contemplate the change in our relationship. I had not spoken to her since our date except to mumble "hello," evading her puzzled eyes.

However, events at school brought some of my concerns to a head. Senior Day at our school was the one day in four years of buzzer-and-bell regimentation that a student was deemed rational enough to make an important decision, although the seniors rarely took the task too seriously. Every year, of course, the class would vote to have someone come talk with them about sex. The first hour of these sessions involved a too-earnest attempt by some doctor to lower himself to the level of high-school seniors. Derisive hoots greeted the stupid jokes and outdated films favored by these speakers, and rubber models of the male and female sex organs inevitably elicited laughs of either familiarity or surprise. But the real fun always came with the question-and-answer session, the educational benefits of which were quickly forgotten as the session turned into a contest to see who could ask the most bizarre question.

The afternoon program was attended with much less enthusiasm, focusing as it usually did on either higher education or employment opportunities, especially careers in textiles. The uninspiring businessmen and counselors who led these sessions believed in simplistic overheads and the self-fulfillment awaiting anyone lucky enough to work in a mill. Occasionally, however, the seniors would make an inspired choice for the afternoon talks, and so it was that Mr. Freeman came to be invited to school to talk with us about atheism in the Bible Belt.

Somehow, and no one is quite sure how it happened, this selection cleared the first faculty review of speakers, but soon the

principal used his administrative veto to kill the choice. The seniors roused themselves from their end-of-the year torpor long enough to mount a spirited protest, but our principal knew that no community so dominated by Baptists would ever allow an atheist to give a school-sanctioned talk on atheism. The veto stood.

My mom, of course, was shocked when she heard about this controversy. For years she had expressed concern about the wisdom of having high-school seniors meet as a group to listen to a stranger talk to them about sex, but she had contained her concern this side of anger. This latest matter, however, was different, for this man's belief called into question all that my mom, her church, and the community believed in. "That's two hundred souls imperiled every minute that man speaks, no matter what he is talking about," she said, and my brother and my dad, who was already heading for a book, didn't dare contradict her. I, however, felt contentious and in a shaking and high-pitched voice accused her of being close-minded.

My dad no longer bothered confronting my mom, and with the prom coming up she had too much leverage on my sister. My brother just didn't care. I was out there alone. I erred in not feeling my way into the argument, but I was mad, too. My mom listened for several minutes to my sputtering declaration that seventeen year olds were mature enough to listen to an atheist without automatically becoming atheists themselves. "And," I added, "a little questioning might even make some people's faith that much stronger. Look at ..."

I didn't get to finish my sentence. Mom was narrowing her eyes at me in a way that made even my dad notice. "Son," he said, refocusing as he slowly came up out of his professorial fog, "your mother isn't calling for unexamined faith, but she feels that seniors in high school are too impressionable, too prone to do what is fashionable to honestly evaluate this man's words."

"Dad," I countered, "if you don't expose them to it now, while they are still with their parents and in their community, they will be exposed to it in college where it really is fashionable."

"Son," my dad continued, "seniors in high school might see the fact that this man was allowed to speak as proof that this belief is in some way legitimate."

My mom wasn't listening to me or my dad. At first she was too mad to speak, for which I was glad, but too soon for me she calmed down enough to begin to rebut what I had felt was a carefully reasoned argument. There was a disconcerting edge to her voice. "Young man," she said, "let me tell you one thing. You think that you are being logical, and that I am being irrational and blinded by my belief. But I saw you reading that letter the other day, and I bet that you liked the fact that Freeman quoted Voltaire. But let me tell you one thing about Voltaire. He died screaming in agony, the agony of the realization that pride and vanity had kept him from seeing the beloved truth that he so often championed. He died in agony, Son, realizing that he now faced an eternity of separation from the one source of hope,

happiness, love...." The word "love" trailed off of her lips, for what had begun as an angry refutation had turned into more of a plea. My mom had begun crying, and she now stepped past me and walked upstairs to her bedroom.

I was stunned. I knew that my dad would go up to Mom soon, but first he turned to me, trying to gauge how I felt. "You know how your mother feels about religion, Son. It scares her to see you even starting to question her faith and, in her eyes at least, endangering your own salvation. Nothing worries her more."

I, too, was very upset now, but I didn't want my brother and sister to see how shaken I was. I got up from the table, grabbed my basketball, and dribbled up the drive and onto the road. Taking a left turn, I instinctively headed towards Jenny's house, reaching the curb of her walk before remembering that I couldn't turn to her. So I headed towards the park.

As I neared the playground, the nimbus of the court's one light softened into the damp night air. At the light's margins, moths fluttered. I stepped onto the court, stripped off my shirt, and flipped the ball towards the bent rim and tattered net. The comforting routine of shooting, rebounding, and dribbling quickly dissipated much of my frustration. After a few shots, I was unaware of the ball in my hands, its rhythms--the clustering staccatos of jump shots and measured cadences of free throws--sending out an echoing morse into the night's emergent sounds.

After two hours, I finally sat down to rest, sharp-breathed and slippery with sweat. It was only then that I began once again to think about the past few days in my life. I was more confused than I had ever been, but what really bothered me was the dawning realization that my life was never going to be simple again. As confused as I was, however, I knew that I needed to go back and apologize to my mom. I scooped up my ball and headed home to one of the few certainties left in my life: my mother's love, which, for that night at least, was comfort enough.

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

The Question Meow

Wayne Robbins

In the middle of others, the hopeless, the
helpless, the somebody help me, the

let me go outside, the feed me please, all of the
wails through the bedroom door,

comes a dip to the sky of voice,
half-moon of air and then suddenly

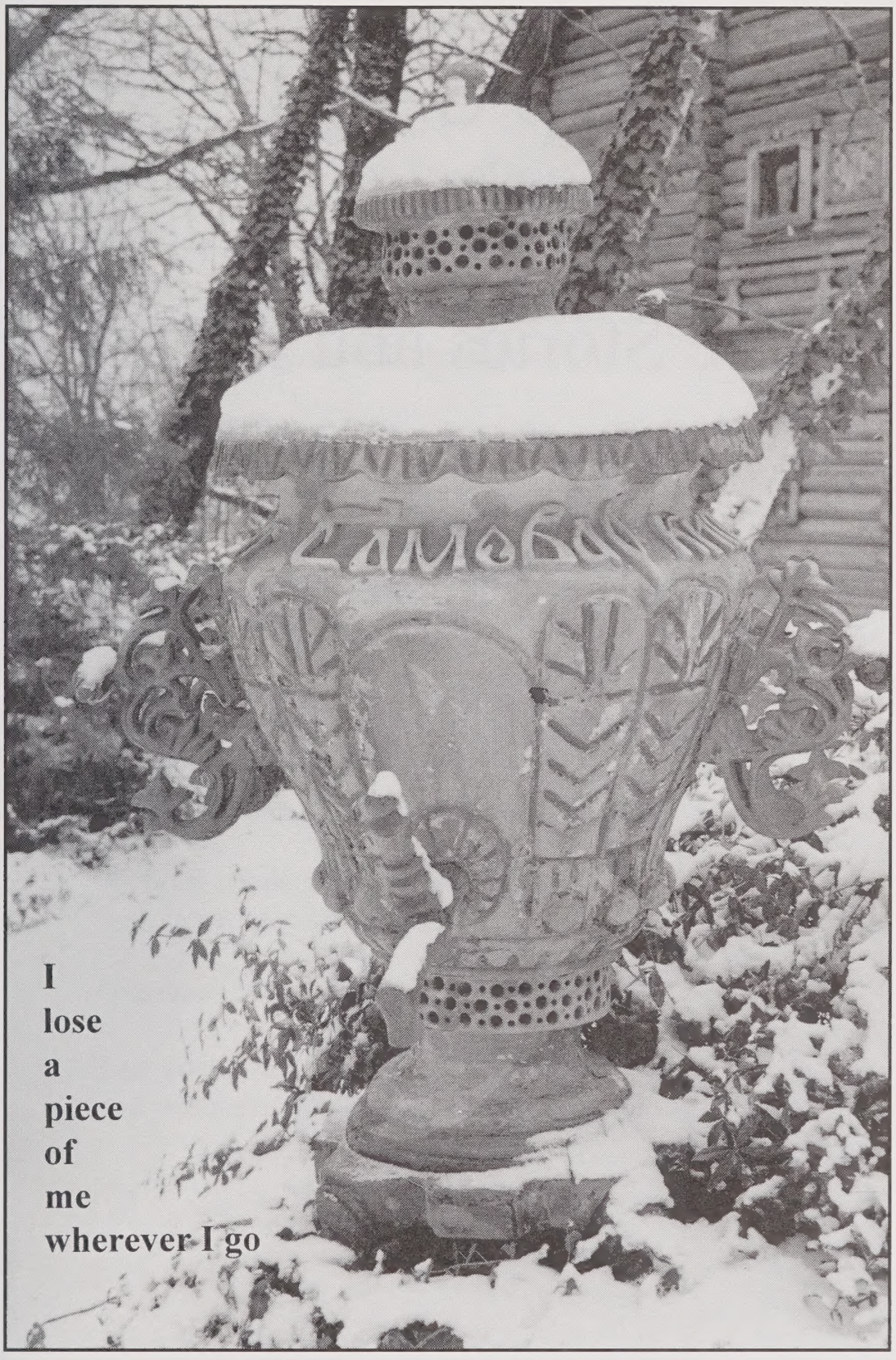
everything up to this point
is in question.

A Fingernail in Pittsboro, NC

Wayne Robbins

Untitled Photo

Peggy Higgins



This issue features

New Ground

The Stories and Poems

of

Nancy Dillingham

Funeral

Nancy Dillingham

The sun was so hot
even the plastic flowers looked wilted.

"Isn't it a lovely day for a funeral?"

The angry fist in my chest
beat against my best Sunday dress.

"I love the view from here."

. . .

Aunt Pallie is dead, Daddy said.
We went to pay our respects.

"She looks like she could speak."

I remember Uncle Jeff in a rocker,
his features stone, light catching on his bald head,

his bony hands moldy onion skin
with large, blue-black veins.

"He won't live long without her."

I sat on the bed near the casket
and wondered where Aunt Pallie's legs were.

Some Traveling Music, Please

Nancy Dillingham

You sit on your side
marking your territory,
one arm thrown carelessly out the window,
resting on the rolled-down glass,
the other barely touching the steering wheel,
moving it magically.

I admire your profile,
tough, browned, and handsome,
but I wouldn't want to say so.
I've learned this about you:
You'd rather things were left unsaid
and, sometimes, consider talking a slight.

I suppose I like that about you--
one doesn't have to shout;
still, given half the chance,
I'd like to have your eyes linger
rather than glance.

A little traveling music, babe, you say.
I flip on the radio,
and forward we fly
into the darkness together
as night settles.

Forbidden Fruit

Nancy Dillingham

The heat bangs off the dark blue and white Humko lard buckets as she swings them back and forth in either hand. Beyond the paved road, the now-shaded, powder-dry path leads into the woods. She walks along the path until she comes to an opening leading to a meadow-like field. Eden-like, it is a new world filled with clumps of forbidden fruit, for this is government property. But the wild strawberries are ripe, and everyone knows that the park ranger is not at home in the mornings.

The berries smell sweet and hang in heavy clusters. Their oblong shapes seem stretched to fullness leaving a slightly whitened neck under the cap. They are particularly large for wild strawberries, and she and her mother come here each year to pick them for fresh pies and jam. After much begging and cajoling, she has persuaded her mother to let her come alone for just this one time. The earth is loamy, and the air is damply hot. Protected by their leaves and small, dry sticks, the berries are coated with a fine mist, like frost.

It is immensely quiet, and the first berries fall with small thumps into the bucket as she picks, lifting the vines, being careful not to step on ripe berries as she moves from one corner of the field to the center. She fills one of the two gallon buckets and, except for an occasional twig snapping as she steps and a hummingbird whirring in sudden intervals, hears only the soft grass move under her feet. She no longer hears the intermittent, shrill cry and drone of the sawmill in the valley below.

She is hot now and sits under a tree at the edge of the patch. Her hat is wet, and, as she takes it off, some hair, lightened by the sun, falls

around her neck. She sets the bucket of berries carefully on a flat rock in the shade of the tree. She pries the top off the other bucket, which she has left under the tree, and eats. The cornbread is fat and cold, and the onions are small and fresh, their tops stubby and green where they have been chopped off. She grinds them into a mound of salt which she has poured from a piece of folded waxed paper onto the bucket's lid.

When she is finished eating, she smooths the remaining salt into a flat, round circle on the lid and scrawls her initials in it. Then she abruptly flings it away, dusts out the lid, claps her hands together to get rid of the salt, and jumps up. A small, pale-blue butterfly zigzags in her path and lights on the bucket of berries. She catches it and, holding it gently between thumb and forefinger, carries it away from the tree into the sun and throws it forward and upward. Fly away, little butterfly, she says and goes back for her hat and the now-empty other bucket.

When the second bucket is filled, she turns from the silence of the field and the converging, small paths of parted vines and grass where she has picked. Her eyes catch the flash of red, like a bird, darting across the opening to the woods. She walks towards it. The red moves as she moves, suddenly filling up the opening. Unafraid, she continues to walk, her eyes fixing on the red shirt with sleeves rolled up over the elbows of brown arms then moving downward to blue work pants rolled at the top of hard, cracked boots. Her eyes are drawn upward again to the burst of red, then slowly to the eyes in the face above. She stops, turns and moves again towards the tree where she drops her bucket and sits propped against the trunk. From beneath the brim of her hat, she looks at the opening. She then lies down on her back and puts her hands under her head. A bird flaps its wings, and she looks up as it lights in a nest in the corner of the second branch above. In a moment, it flies again. She traces the branches in the sky above her. A cloud catches on one of them and appears to break into a head. The dismembered body floats away in the other direction. She floats on the cloud.

Suddenly a twig snaps, and she hears the soft grass moving. As her eyes turn to the field again, the red shirt moves. The body treads heavily through one of her paths, twigs snapping under the boots. She

sits up again and feels him looking down at her. She closes her eyes and opens them again to meet his, intense and shining. She smiles and reaches her hand over to the side of her and offers him the juicy berry she has set on a small rock--the largest, the best of the lot, her souvenir. He bites into it slowly, and she hears the sucking sound as he takes the juice from it. He finishes the berry while she watches, looking at him intently yet innocently, like a child. Then she gets up and straightens her hat, takes the two lard buckets, one in each hand, and starts walking away. He follows, looking puzzled. They both walk out of the forbidden place into the bright sun glaring off the small, shiny rocks on either side of the road. He rights a beat-up, dusty motorcycle and takes the two buckets and hangs one on each handle bar. He steers it through the path out of the woods. He hauls himself onto the machine and jumps it to life with the quick motion of one big, cracked boot. The cycle sputters, catches, and roars. He motions with his head for her to get on behind him. Unhesitatingly, she moves and holds on.

As they roar around the curve, off the graveled road, onto the pavement, she hears again the rasping drone of the sawmill, punctuated at precise intervals with a shrill whine as the saw moves through the logs.

About a mile down the road, she allows her head to rest on the red back as she sees the road suddenly long before them. But seconds later, she says "Here" at a clump of mailboxes with a few straggly petunias growing around them. He scrapes his boot on the pavement and comes to a stop. She gets off, and he hands her the buckets, looks at her for a moment, and revs up again. She watches him disappear into a tiny, black speck at the end of the long, straight expanse of road, the sound no longer loud but soft and muffled, reverberating in her head as she crosses the bridge leading home, swinging her berry-laden buckets.

Requiem

Nancy Dillingham

The land is silent and still.
The pale, sandy earth begs rain.
Tobacco stands in long, even rows,
leaves wilted like silken, green handkerchiefs.

He walks with his familiar gait,
legs slightly straddled,
hands crossed hard behind him,
staring intently at the ground.

He no longer wears his strange apparel,
his funeral garments.

His gray work shirt is darkened
by wings of sweat.
The legs of his blue, gallused overalls
rub against each other.

An errand, he says.

We walk around the road
bruised with beauty.

On the porch, her summer cactus still blooms
her favorite color.
She always wanted to be buried in red.

She lingers in the room
in her Spring Flowers perfume.

He fumbles among the stack of bills
stuck between the radio and the Bible.

Answers to the federal government he dictates
as I write:
His wife has died . . .

I close the door behind me.

The oncoming roar of the usual afternoon shower
breaks the string in my mind;

the calm is shot by the sweetest sound
as the first drops begin to pound
the parched ground.

Reunions

Nancy Dillingham

After food on the porch
lined with flower buckets
and straw-bottomed chairs
that moved with the sun,
children climbed on the island of
rock to play and pose.

I remember Grandma,
her eyes still keenly blue,
wondering about saving seed from the hollyhock.

I hear her remembering:
Grandpa cutting logs from around the rock
to build the house;

her children running naked
in the cane patch below the rock
once when they had the itch;

the burning of tobacco beds all night,
and young boys getting drunk for the first time
then getting sick and lying against the big, cool rock
until sunrise;

children playing church on the big rock,
singing old revival songs in high, quavery voices
in the twilight.

Grandma died last year,
and one Saturday afternoon when the sun had dropped
and moved invisible chairs to the last triangle of shade
on the front porch,

strangers set sticks of dynamite under the rock,
and, in the falling light, the big rock groaned
and then crumpled like a giant clod of dirt.

The sun's red glow died on the horizon
like the last coals of a burnt-out tobacco bed.

Heart of the Matter

Nancy Dillingham

Across the road from the house he built with his own hands and which, as the story goes, had five bullets embedded in its bedroom ceiling, was the pond, man-made and stocked with fish but, more often, used as a swimming hole--especially after he had gone to prison and it became a public domain.

In the summers, the young boys swam in its murky core, looking with blinded eyes for the gun that he had supposedly thrown there, fantasizing the water clear and bright as glass reflecting the gun--big, bold, and blue-black--lying on its back on the silty floor. They imagined themselves bringing it to the surface, holding it high above their heads in their wet, young arms, waving it like a flag, shouting, Look, I've found it! I've found it!

But just as often, as they dove under the water, their arrow-slim bodies splitting the surface like shattering glass, they imagined her, his wife, there, rising from Poseidon's wide eye, red hair flowing, calling to them like a Siren in a softly hypnotic voice, her eyes glittering across the watery expanse,

In their nether world between heaven and hell, they floated out of time and into her arms. She held them more tenderly than did all the young girls who walked in the sunlit summer days above the earth's surface. They drowned in her.

When he suddenly returned a few years later, the young bodies rose out of the water like sleek seals, throwing off her charms like the droplets of water they shook from themselves.

One year late in summer, enticed by the few dollars offered, some of them were gathered at a neighbor's field to put up tobacco when he walked up, offering to help. Lined up like brown soldiers, the boys jerked the loaded sticks from the ground and handed them up to him as he stood straddle-legged, balancing all the while, on the trailer behind the slow-moving tractor. With great strength, he swung the sticks up and slapped them against each other, standing them up in the back of the trailer.

At the barn, he got off, climbed up and stood astride two tiers while the boys took turns mounting the trailer and handing the sticks up to him to hang, the others watching with crossed arms from the door of the barn.

The first thing they heard was a sharp, cracking sound as one of the tiers he was standing on began to give way. Then they saw him begin to balance himself. They noticed the small cracks in his black, scuffed-up boots, made from their getting wet and drying out too many times, as he shifted them in an attempt to take some weight off the breaking tier.

His arms flailing now, off-balance, he used the heavy, loaded stick that he had been in the act of hanging in a now-futile attempt to regain his balance, holding it, acrobat-like, above his head. The man driving the tractor looked dazed, almost asleep. The boy standing on the trailer still held the next stick, poised in the act of handing it up, his eyes widening, a look of astonishment spreading like water over his face. The others stood in the barn door, feet apart, arms folded, a row of brown statues, rooted to the ground.

The next thing they heard was a crash and a sharp cry, then a long, sustained moan, then silence as the dust settled. The broken tier hung down now in two splintered pieces, and they saw him there between them, impaled on the tobacco stick that he had been about to hang, the leaves askew, partially obscuring him. The stalks of cut tobacco had slid to the end of the wooden stick that was embedded in his chest, giving it force, weighing it down. A blob of purplish blood was seeping down the front of his overalls, some of it staining the brightly golden, curing-out leaves. His head slumped over his chest, he hung there stiffly on the stick, his upper body like that of the scarecrow in the cornfield above them, his legs rubbery, turned at grotesque angles, the shoes looking too heavy now.

In that first moment of immense silence that followed, the man on the tractor began to move, heavy and uncoordinated at first. Then he was there, the horror reflected in his face. The row of young boys stood there still, apart yet irrevocably joined, feeling the dying man's pain burning in their hearts, nailing them forever to the spot.

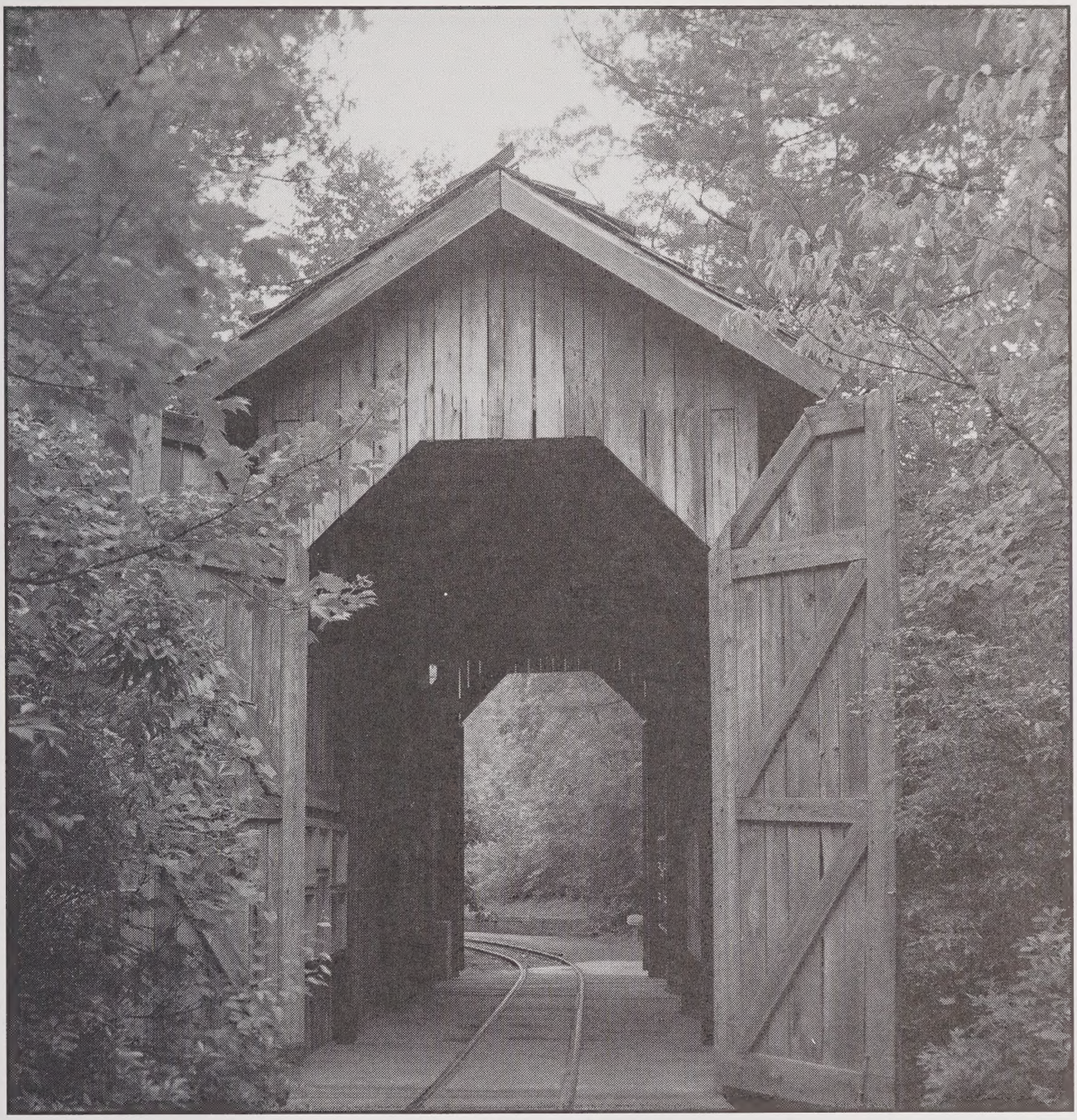


Photo by Lee Schleining

A Bent Page

Larry LeMasters

My head drops from my hand. Jerking awake,
I look about my cluttered cottage.
My neck turns slowly; it is stiff and aches.
On the floor Eliot lies open. A bent page
May have startled me with its versed rage.

Shadows cast dark images upon
Rough-hewn sooted stone as dying embers
Glow where blazing light once lived. Not long
I sat in stupored thought when a stir
Caught my eye near the pile of ash and fir.

A field mouse stood on feet and hairless tail
With pointed snout quivering. Perked ears,
Gray hair, elongated body--so frail.
All alone, he sought shelter and heat, here
Among shadows, mortality, and fear.

I sat and shared my death with the mouse.
A week later, my daughter sold the house.

I Remember

Larry LeMasters

There and there and here is where we lived.
There is where I got the first bed of my own.
That was our neighborhood store.
I remember walking a mile, barefoot and uphill,
In six inches of snow to buy Mail Pouch for Dad.

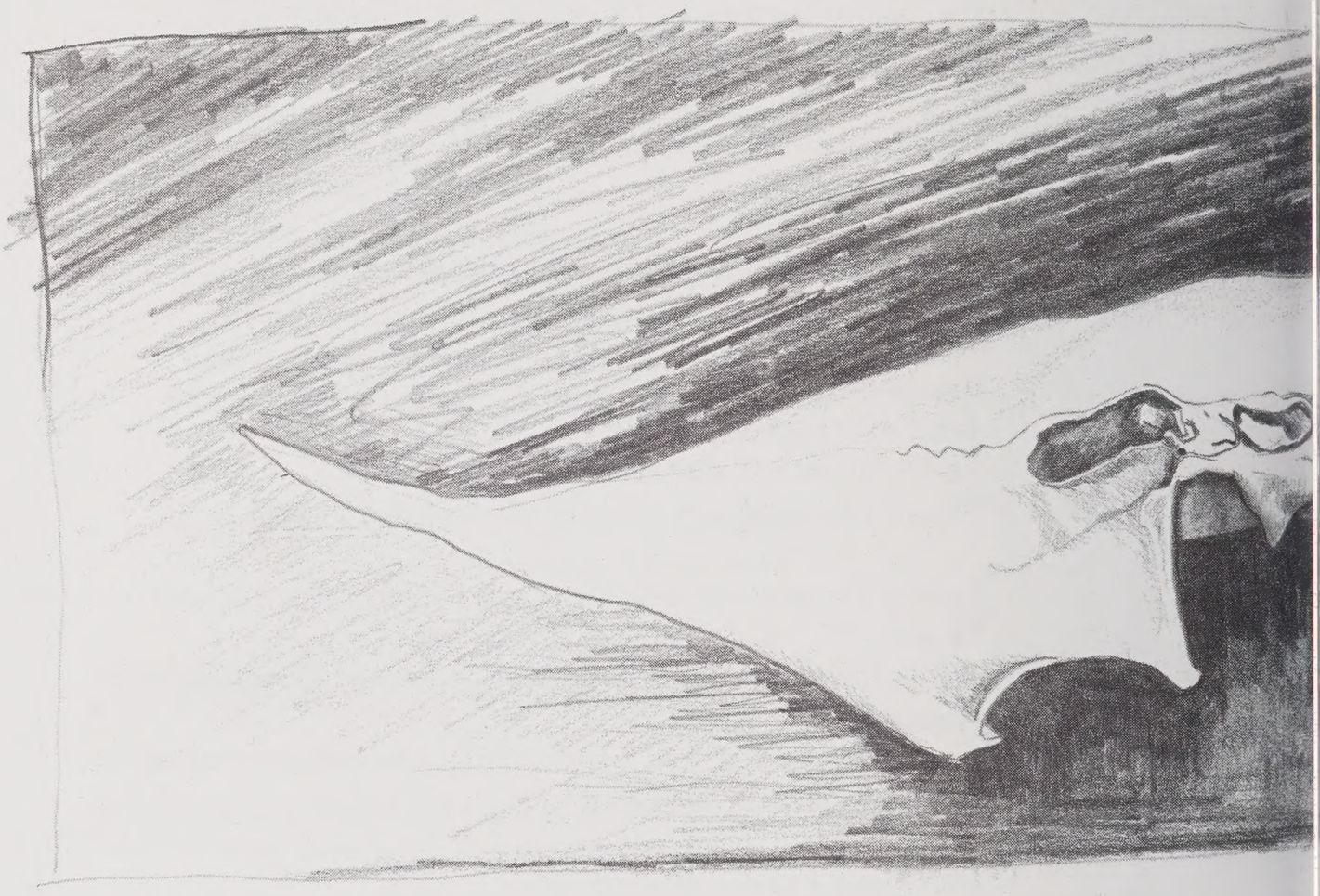
Uphill in both directions?
Certainly!

Your grandma and me went to school there;
It's where we first met.
The teacher asked us silly things:
Fourteen squared equals?
What's the capital of Iowa?
Who's buried in Grant's tomb?
What's your strongest memory of your grandfather?

Cecilia Thomas told how she used to ride her grandfather's back like a horse.
Willie Joe caught bull-heads in the Suwannee River with his grandpapa.
Sarah brought a squirrel whittled from a hickory log, telling how
Her grandpa saw life in all things.

Me? Yeah, I have memories too.
Granddad always kept a cold strawberry soda close by.
He let me win at checkers.
And I remember his left shoe fell off the night they lynched him
For drinking from a whites only fountain on Main Street.

I remember.



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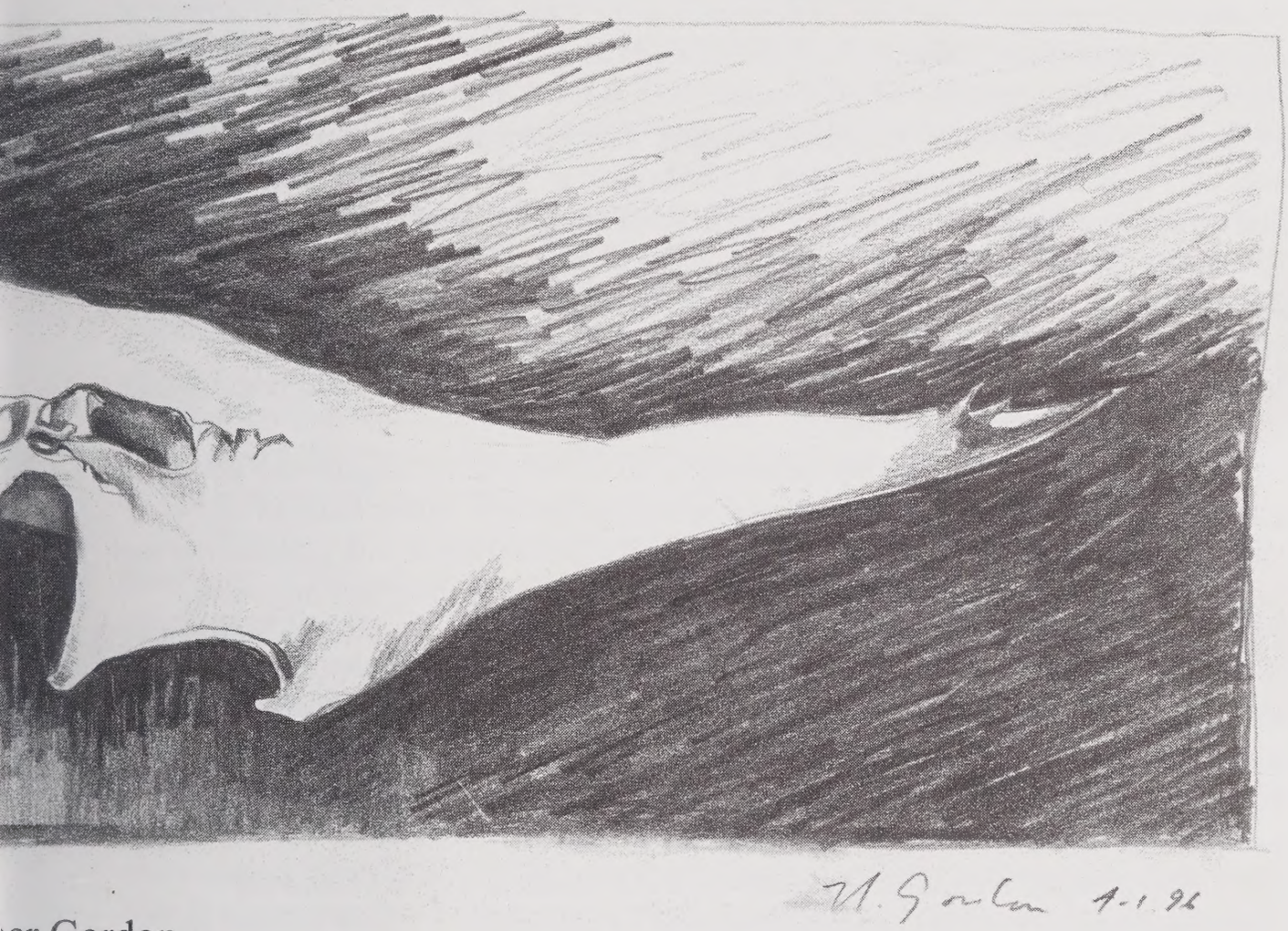


ıer Gordon

Power and Responsibility in English 101

Kathy White

In 1981, I was the age of most of my current students, but, instead of struggling with English 101, I was struggling with an industrial sewing machine on an assembly line. In 1988, the factory closed its doors, and I returned to school at the local community college. I am convinced that the seven years in between are the basis of the criteria by which I judge what is most important to teach my own English students. When I returned to school nine years after graduation from high school, I took English 101 and Math 151. I made a "B" in English, but that English class had a profound impact on my life beyond sharpening my writing skills. Over three quarters, the instructor created a community in which I learned that what I have to say can have impact on the thoughts and actions of others and that I can minimize and maximize that effect by honing the necessary skills. Equally important, I learned through interaction with my classmates that I am responsible for the effect I choose to create.

On the assembly line, my value lay in the ability to relinquish any personal power and to effectively become a part of the machinery. After years in an environment where my voice was noticed only if it interfered with production and profit, the discovery I made in 101 was liberating, exhilarating and inspiring. Creating a classroom in which my own students can begin that process of discovery has become my primary goal as a writing teacher. Deciding how best to encourage them to discover the power of language and the power of their own voices is an ongoing process of trial and error. I must be willing to admit when an idea, however brilliant it appears, is not creating the opportunity for students to move ever so slightly toward that goal of discovery.

My primary responsibility--and the basic tenet on which I build my classroom strategy--is to encourage students to take risks. I firmly believe that a student who plays by all the grammar and classroom-etiquette rules and dutifully turns in mechanically correct formal papers but never takes a chance with form or content will leave my class an adequate writer. However, I regret if she leaves without coming near any new sense of power and responsibility. If, on the other hand, I can get that student to grab onto that more radical idea dancing around in her head, to dare try to write it down, to share it--any success she has belongs to

her. The resulting confidence is the beginning of realizing that writing can be more than a tool used to write college papers, that writing can be key to gaining more control over her own education and, consequently, her future.

The question then becomes practical. How do I convince students to take risks in my classroom? I attempt to create a "safe" place for class discussion. From the first day of class, I encourage students to view me as another learner, not as some supreme authority. I include a statement to that effect on my syllabus. I do not pretend that I don't have to function as their teacher in practical ways; they know that I have classroom policies to guarantee consistency in experience, and that I must evaluate their work, but I emphasize that I, too, am a student (and hope always to be). I am simply at a different stage of an educational process, a stage that they may choose to pursue or not. I don't have definitive answers to questions that arise in discussion which leaves them to find the value in their own evaluation of issues.

Viewing me as a learner promotes risk taking in other ways as well. Fostering of community frees the students to claim and voice their ideas without fear of chastisement by the "one" at the top with the "right" answer. Collaborative workshop sessions let students hear their peers and realize that no one's voice is privileged but that all have equal opportunity to be heard (or read) and considered. Eventually, this realization leads to increased confidence and increased awareness of the effect their voice has on the community of learners, encouraging them to accept responsibility for their own words.

Another critical component of creating a classroom conducive to the discovery of individual power and responsibility is designing a course program which provides the student with the freedom to decide where the urgency lies for them and to create a response that imparts personal meaning. Allowing this freedom involves some risk taking on the part of the instructor, as she/he has less control over the learning situation. The course becomes less predictable and planning must leave room for the students' influence. But, by giving up power in the situation, I leave them with the responsibility to address their own urgency, encouraging them to desire the means of effectively communicating that urgency. This is not to say that I allow my students to write about anything that comes to mind at any point in the class. I emphasize the students' responsibility to become aware of the ongoing, larger conversation regarding a particular set of issues before they actually join the discourse. We read and discuss several essays from various perspectives without privileging any political position, before any formal writing begins. Some articles are assigned, and students collect others which interest them. Often, they respond to new ideas in journal entries before class discussion to preserve individual first thoughts on the subject. Then, students can identify a

question that is an issue for them, not necessarily for the class, and write their ideas into the larger discourse community.

Of course some students may always politely or impolitely abstain from the community and attempt to avoid the resulting responsibility. Admittedly, the success of my strategy depends largely on the student's willingness to work toward a goal. But even the uncooperative students must be affected by the freedom in my classroom to exercise their voices and the responsibility that necessarily comes with that freedom if in no other way than to learn that their end product directly reflects the degree of energy they choose to invest. Without authority to blame or credit, they are responsible for whatever they take or don't take from the class. Ultimately, students can hardly remain in the class and not accept responsibility for the outcome.

Some students may come into the class with a well-developed sense of personal power and responsibility as relatively few will come from a factory. What then does my agenda offer that student? Just as the value of writing cannot be exhausted by practice, similarly I cannot believe any student reaches a level on which further refinement of an ability to control the power of language and respond to resulting responsibility is no longer valuable. More likely, there will be students who believe they have a voice worth hearing but have spent little time hearing the voices of others in the community, a scenario which is addressed by insuring that they are exposed to and asked to respond to various voices. Perhaps the most difficult trial of my philosophy comes from students whose voices I find personally distasteful: racist, sexist, homophobic, misogynic, etc. Logically, those perspectives, however unpleasant, must be heard and evaluated by the community in order for students to have a complete knowledge of the ongoing conversation and thus be able to join in responsibly. Consequently, rarely will students expressing objectionable opinions escape the censure of their classmates or the responsibility of creating their response, and the entire community benefits from the process of hearing, evaluating and challenging even the most offensive voice.

My goal is to provide a class experience which allows students the freedom to discover power in language and voice as well as the resulting responsibility. I have yet to find a problem that cannot be resolved within my philosophical frame. While I am not naive enough to think that every student who leaves my class will feel powerful and responsible in new ways, I know from my own experience that my attempt to allow students that discovery is a seed planted. Cultivation is their choice and responsibility.

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin

John Bird Series
Number 6
The Victory Garden

M.J. Ferrell

Clarabel stared at the magazine she was holding. There was a full page on making a garden. The Sears and Roebuck catalogue had WAC uniforms for girls, too. Maybe Polly would order her one of those, and she would wear it while she worked in her victory garden. Clarabel took a long time to look at the magazine and the catalogue. She had a magic feeling and thought how it would feel to wear a uniform and to march in it, to be a WAC girl.

"Mommy," Clarabel said, "Do you have any garden seed left?"

"We do have some corn seed and some cornfield bean seed," said Polly. "And you can go out to the hogpen and get all them volunteer tommy toe tomato plants and set them out. Some of them may even be big tomatoes."

Clarabel gathered up the seeds and put them in her britches pockets. She walked to the very bottom half of the plowed, planted garden. There was a small end spot jutting down near the trail which had not been planted, where the horse had turned around with the plough and the "harr" when the garden was being worked. This was where she decided to make her garden. Clarabel started to lay off her rows just like she had seen Polly and John Bird do. She tried to keep them straight. She had to dig with the hoe and, at the same time, think about the straight way they had to be. She got six rows dug all the way through the patch in spite of worrying with getting them straight. Polly come by to look. "Well, the rows are some crooked, but they will still grow, maybe hold more seed."

Clarabel took out the corn seed, holding a hand full, and dropped the seed into the rows about a foot apart. Then she came back over the same rows and dropped in two bean seeds to each hill of corn. That was so each hill of cornfield beans could run up a cornstalk.

"You might want to fertilize it some," said Polly, "The ground is pore down here. Take a bucket and shovel and go up to the chicken house and get some chicken manure and put in the rows."

Clarabel was beginning to sweat, but she decided that a WAC would march out to the chicken house and haul out the manure. The manure was a bit smelly, but dry, so it was easy to shovel. Clarabel took the manure back and scattered a

little all along inside the open corn and bean row. Then, with a hoe, she covered up the seed.

About that time, Thomas came up the trail from the mailbox and walked right through the garden. He thought this garden was really funny and didn't matter at all. She wondered how she would keep Thomas from walking through the garden. Then it came to her what to do--she'd put up a no trespassing sign. That's what Weve Swangim had up on his place across the creek, and nobody messed in his place. Anyway, she was hungry, and it was close to supper time. She would finish up the garden tomorrow.

Polly hollered to Clarabel from the front porch, "Come to supper, bread and butter." Clarabel went in the back door and sat down at the table. Polly had prepared a cold supper to keep from firing up the wood cookstove. She had cornbread, beans, and potatoes left over from dinner. John Bird had put out pickle beets, butter and honey on the table, too. Thomas had been sent to the spring for milk, and Polly had already skimmed the milk, pouring everybody a glass full. She had peeled and sliced two onions, too. So everybody could have a quarter. Clarabel took a quarter of the onion, and pinched some salt out of the salt dish to put by her plate on the oilcloth to dip the onion in. It tasted good to take a bite of onion and then take a bite of cornbread. A swig of milk washed the big bite down.

Polly washed the dishes in the dishpan on the cooktable, poured water over them to rinse them and then dried them and put them up in the cupboard. John Bird and Thomas were already in the front room, listening to the radio. They were silent while they listened to the war news. John Bird said, "I'm turning the radio off, not going to burn up the batteries. Let's set on the front porch. I see Margaret and John coming down the field, and we can set and talk awhile."

CIarabel sat as long as she could listening to the old tales being told on the porch. She got ready to go inside.

"You wash your feet before you get into that bed," Polly said. Clarabel went into the kitchen and got the washpan off the cook table, poured in some water out of the water bucket, sat down in a straight chair and soaped and washed her feet. She dried them on a feed sack towel which hung on the doorknob. Clarabel went into the back room and got in her bed. Before she went to sleep, she thought about her box of things she kept under her bed and pulled it out to look in it. It was full of Indian arrow heads she had picked up down in patch town close to the Caney Fork Creek. She looked at them, ran her fingers over them, thought about the long ago. Then she put the box back under her bed and went to sleep.

The next morning Clarabel ate her breakfast down and headed back to the garden. She dug holes for the volunteer tomato plants, put the chicken manure in

the holes, and then strolled up behind the house to the barn and the hogpen where the plants were growing. Clarabel pulled up a handful of the plants, smelling their tomato smell. She looked at the tomato leaves, seeing the little bitty hairs, the pretty way they looked. She took the plants back to the garden and put one in each hole she had dug. She knew she would have to water them now, so she headed for the house to get the water bucket. She had to go to the spring to fill up the water bucket, setting it under the spring water spout to fill up. The water spout was made from two narrow boards nailed together to form a V. John Bird had made the spring spout by building a little dam at the edge of the spring and putting the board spout near the top to make the water run out.

Clarabel carried the bucket with the dipper in it carefully down to the garden patch. She went to each tomato hole and put in two dipperfuls of water. Then she hoed the dirt up around the plants, holding onto each one as she hoed. She straightened up the plants with her hands, then stomped the dirt firm around them.

Polly come down to look at the garden. "Go and break some limbs to shade the tomato plants," she said. Clarabel ran off to the hill above the house to break some limbs, thinking that this was getting hard. She came back with the broken limbs with green leaves on them and stuck them into the ground to shade the new tomato plants.

What I need now is to get my sign up, thought Clarabel, so she went in the house to the front room and tore out a page from John Bird's tablet. She also slipped in to get John Bird's indelible pencil. He didn't allow Clarabel to play with his indelible pencil, but she wanted the writing on this sign to be permanent. Clarabel studied and studied on how to spell trespassing, but she couldn't spell it. If she was at the John's Creek Schoolhouse, she would go to the dictionary stand and look it up, but she didn't have a dictionary at home. So she concluded she would have to make up a sign that she could spell. She lettered the sign, found a stick to nail it on, got a hammer and a nail and nailed up the tablet page. She got the go-devil, went to the garden and drove the stick into the ground. Clarabel looked back at her Victory garden and had a good feeling.

NO STOPPING OR PASSING, said the sign.

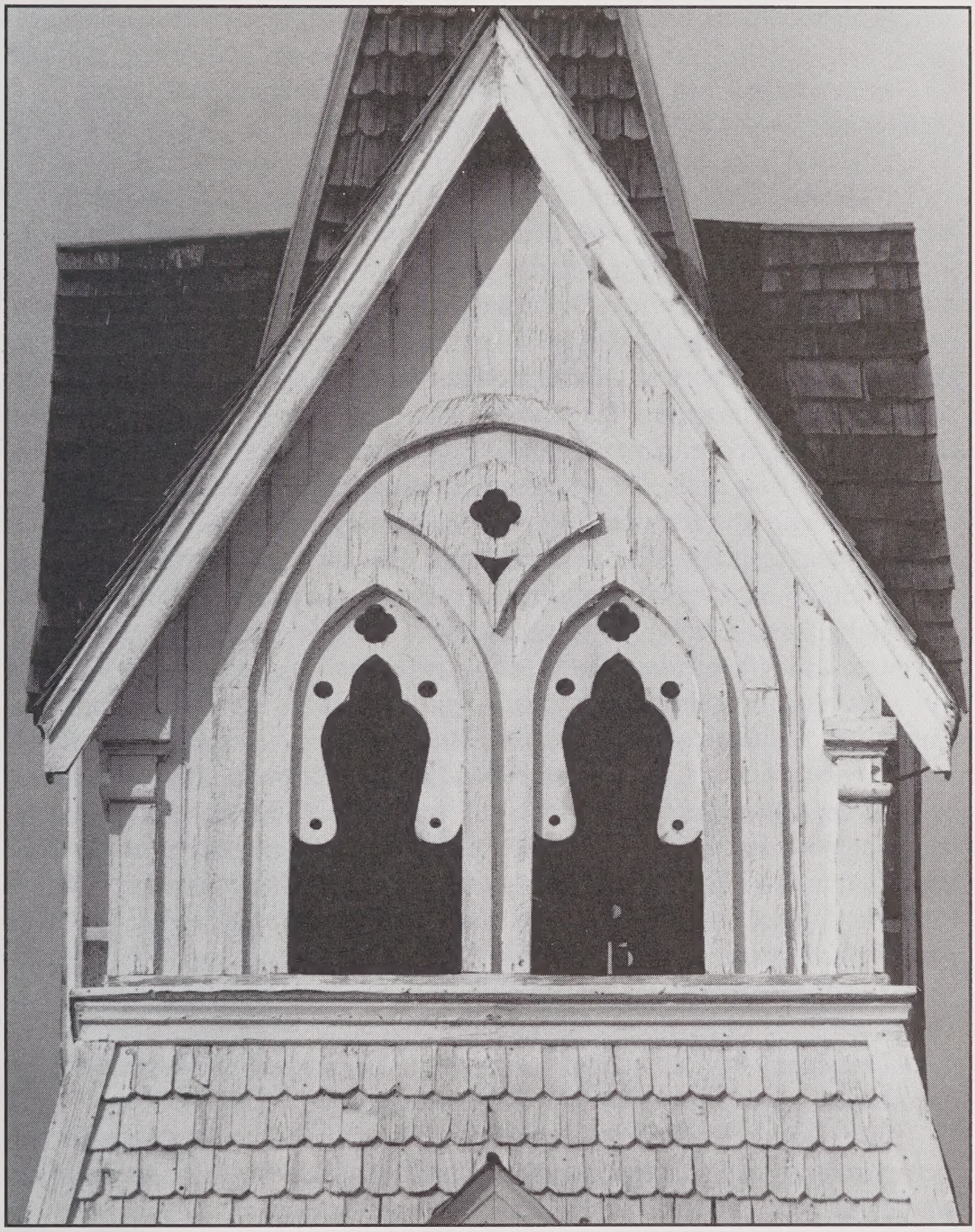


Photo by Lee Schleining

Mr. North Wind

Teresa Kennedy

"Oh, Mr. Glabb, you are so wrong! This New Englander can handle any winter these North Carolina mountains dare to dish out to me." Those were my thoughts as I met my closest neighbor who lived about three miles down the back of Ole Bearwallar Mountain. He surely doesn't know me or how used to winter I am. After all, I had made it through those two weeks in January, when in Vermont the thermometer had read about 35 degrees below zero each day. Those were the weeks when it was necessary to adopt the special routines every Vermonter begins to accept as normal January precautions. Take in the battery from the car each night and store it in the house, adding a prayer that it will start the car in the morning. When you go outside, breathe through a scarf or else your lungs will feel like they're full of icicles. Surely anyone who can adapt to that way of life can handle Ole Bearwallar. As I was thinking how wrong he was, Mr. Glabb added, "This mountain will either make ya or break ya--you'll see."

So, August came and went, and I enjoyed the view from the swing hanging on the porch on the front of the house. What a gorgeous, peaceful valley lay below me! Then September and all the glorious North Carolina colors came out to dazzle me. Not a bad display, this Vermont-foliage native had to admit. September also brought the flurry of autumn activities. We began to harvest from our huge garden. I carefully canned and preserved and stored in the root cellar all the food anyone could need in any winter conditions. "Oh, Mr. Glabb, you're so wrong!"

October followed September, and we began to pile up the fire wood. The house was heated only by wood stoves, but we Vermonters were used to that. One cord, two cords, three cords, surely that's enough. Well, maybe one more for good measure. "Oh, Mr. Glabb, you are wrong!"

Then came November and a wonderful respite from all the frenzied storing and piling and preparing of September and October. Once again, I sat on the porch swing and looked down in the valley. More of it was visible now with the leaves down on the ground. Also the valley lights at dusk were

a welcome hello from my neighbors below. They really aren't so far away. "Oh, Mr. Glabb, you are so wrong!"

December brought the holiday season and all the preparations for a family Christmas, including the anticipation of a visit from the step-daughter and new son-in-law who had never before seen our mountain retreat. Everything had to be perfect! I can handle this life, and I can handle whatever this mountain has in store for me. It's so easy. "Oh, Mr. Glabb, you are indeed wrong!"

Christmas eve day dawned cold and crisp, and I began to see that maybe North Carolina could rival a Vermont winter, or at least maybe on this mountain it could. No problem, though; it couldn't be any worse than Vermont. "Oh, Mr. Glabb, you are so wrong!"

The holiday activities continued in the old farmhouse much as planned, and the family moved closer to the wood stoves to share the memories and the stories that hadn't been shared since the last Christmas. Suddenly the stories were interrupted by a loud and unwelcomed north wind, a north wind that now in my acquired wisdom is a real entity to be respected. That wind came hollering down the side of the mountain and then back up again. It seemed as if a steam engine complete with whistle had been set loose on Ole Bearwallar. I had to admit I'd never heard a wind like that in Vermont. "Maybe, Mr. Glabb, this mountain is a little tough in the winter, but I'll handle it. You'll see."

That wind shook the house, sucked all the heat that the wood stoves could produce right up the chimneys and even rocked the water back and forth in the commode. I wouldn't have believed it! We stoked the fires--log after log--and the piles of wood were getting smaller with each hour that Mr. North Wind stayed on the mountain. "I think, Mr. Glabb, that I can handle this situation just fine."

With each passing hour the dependable stoves gave us their best, but the temperatures in the house continued to plunge. Soon we closed the door to the upstairs and brought all the house plants from those bedrooms to the first floor. Along with the plants came the mattresses and electric blankets. It was evident that Christmas eve night would be spent camping in the living room next to the Christmas tree. What family fun! "I can handle this, Mr. Glabb!"

Throughout the night, as the children slept soundly, my husband and I got up on the first ring of the alarm clock set for each hour on the hour. We quickly filled the faithful stoves with as many logs as they would hold and then went back to bed next to the Christmas tree to catch what sleep we could. "This is getting tough, Mr. Glabb, but I **can** handle it!"

When the alarm rang at five in the morning, I realized that we had made it through the night. However, I also realized that Mr. North Wind had made it through the night, too, and was still storming and thundering up and down the mountain, stealing all the heat from our farmhouse. I looked at the inside thermometer. Even with all our loading of logs all night long, the kitchen thermometer registered only forty degrees. "Well, Mr. Glabb, do we stay and take our chances of freezing on this old mountain or do we leave?" "Oh, Mr. Glabb, I thought I could make it! But you see, I had never before met Mr. North Wind on Bearwallar. My New England bones had never experienced quite as powerful a fellow as he.

So, disappointed that maybe Ole Bearwallar would break me, I went to the car. We decided that we had better head to the valley, just to be safe. We got in the car, turned the key and ..... nothing! The north wind had stolen our only escape from this cold mountainside. "Surely, Mr. Glabb, I can't let this mountain break me!"

Returning to the house with new determination, I thought and thought. I had to find a way to beat the north wind. I wouldn't let him break me. Finally it dawned on me. It really wasn't such a novel idea. Many others had tried it successfully before me. I believed it could work, so why hadn't I tried it before now. I prayed. After all, what else was there for me to do? There was no other way to fight Mr. North Wind and Ole Bearwallar Mountain. So I did pray, and I did feel better. There, I've done all I can and, "Surely, Mr. Glabb, I can survive with the help of someone stronger than I!"

Well, it was Christmas morning, a time of wonderful happenings, and, for me, the most wonderful one of all occurred that cold December holiday. Mr. North Wind departed about six a.m. and stayed away for several weeks. I didn't let Ole Bearwallar break me. Maybe in a way it had made me! "And, yes, Mr. Glabb, you were right. This Vermonter had a great deal to learn from a north wind in an old North Carolina mountain farmhouse."

Vernal Varmint

G. David Waechter

Oh! Vernal Varmint, fortune teller of spring
Perceiver of the shadows;
forerunner of leaves so green
Vernal Varmint, to you I sing!

Come now, have no feat of the faithful.
Bless us now with your famous talent;
open thine eyes and look beyond thy burrow.
Will blossoms bloom in six weeks or tomorrow?

Oh! Vernal Varmint, leap and prance
Scramble, scramble to the cause;
lead us, be our vanguard with thine furry paws.
We exalt thee in thy glory, so dance, dance!

Vernal Varmint, my love of loves;
bring me peace with onset of spring.

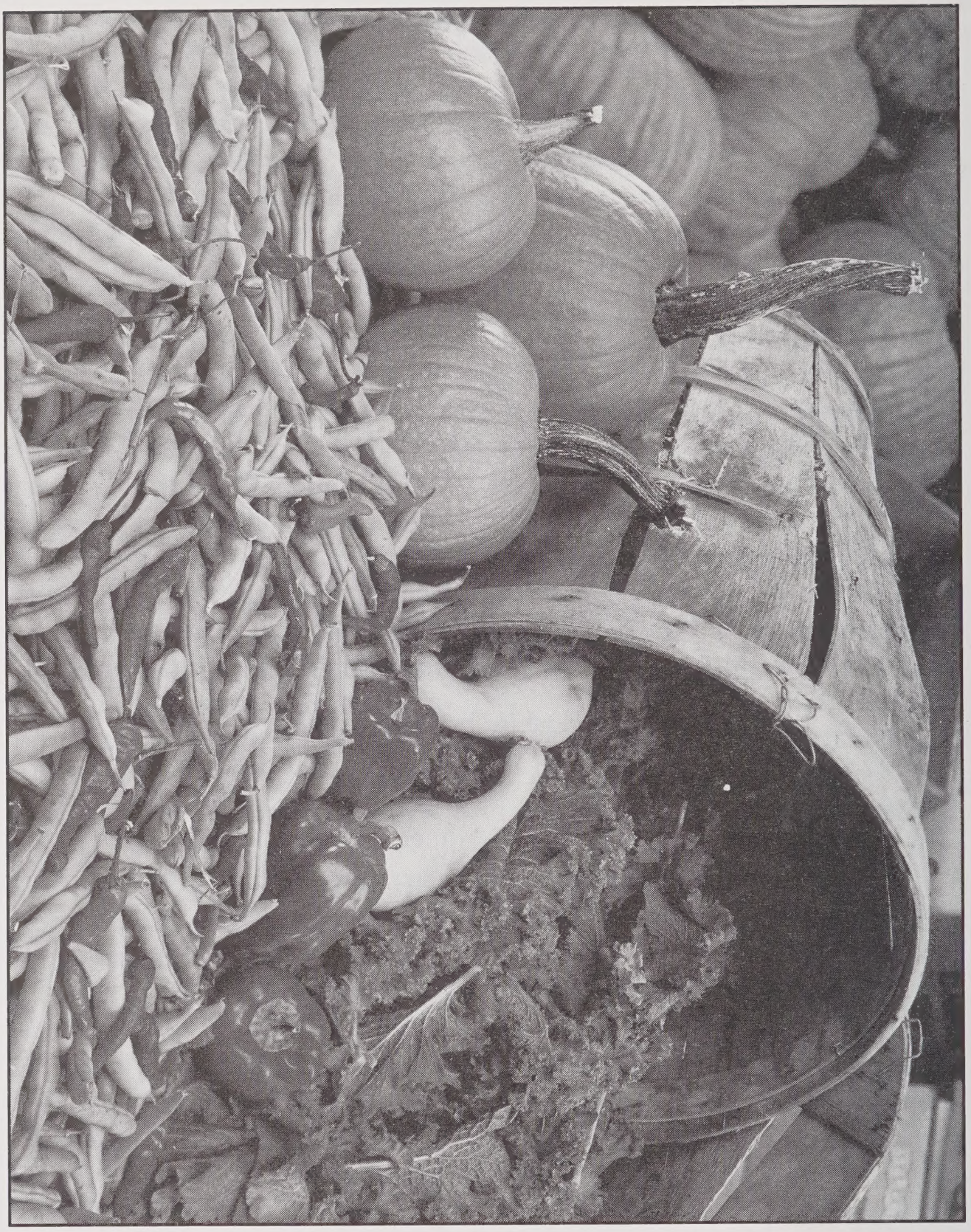


Photo by Tim Barnwell

Untitled

Jeni Parris

Today I thought of you;
dim laughter,
bright smiles,
falling tears.

Today I thought of you;
red flowers,
twinkling stars,
black rain.

Today I thought of you;
wet kisses,
sparkling gold,
bitter separation.

Today I thought of you;
bare caresses,
brilliant sunlight,
resounding silence.

Today I thought of you;
rough wool,
falling snow,
quiet melancholy.

Today I thought of you;
spraying water,
lofty peaks,
stark realization.

Today I thought of you.

Stephanie

Will Hooper

I see a picture--
Loosely tasseled auburn hair
lying on your
long lovely neck
Mischievous sexy smile.
Surely you didn't die?

I see a memory--
the seventh grade--
teacher's pet;
control the class
while he's out--
ring the bell and
settle the class down,
we made a deal--
"let me go outside
let me tell you a secret--"

When we grow up
we sometimes look for love
in strange ways.
Surely you didn't trade your love
for a drink and a steering wheel.

I see a picture--
grit my teeth.

The Tree of Knowledge

Will Hooper

That tree, I tell you--shot to skyblue
in the spring from a shock of grass
and covered with green

And one day I learned there
that sunlight shares its secrets
with leaves and lazy lads

And the tree took its share
and turned the light into pears
while my share became dreams

We laid a path that was straight and green
to that cool shade from the summer heat
that felt like icy water from a stream

And one day I learned as I heard
the wind speaking without words
a vision known only to me

And we turned those pears into Koolaid pops
frozen in Grandma's icebox
purple tongues and sticky hands

In autumn, when the leaves were filled
with secrets they would fall--
A tawny patchwork quilt lay on the ground

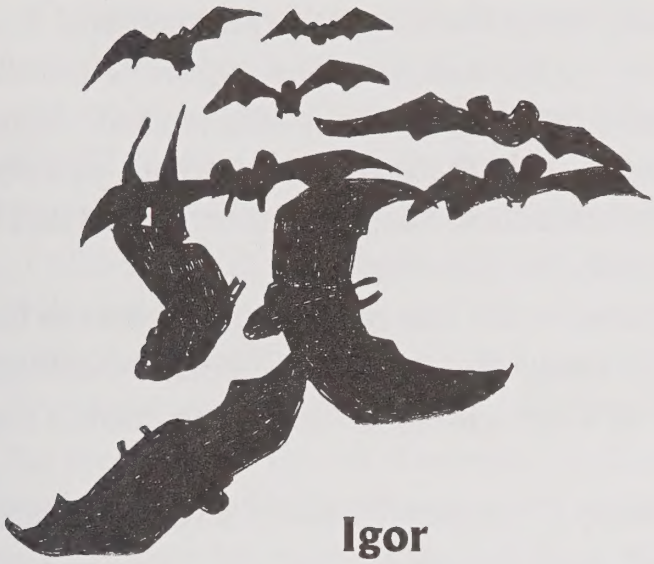
And one day I learned there
that a skeleton can grace the silent land
in November's amber light

Never was death as lovely
as that colored circle beneath the tree
faded from red and gold to brown

One winter I learned something
when the tree was cut down--
A white December snow lay on the ground

The sun's secrets shattered
all around like broken glass
unable to sketch that noble frame

Photo by Shirley McLaughlin



Igor

Julia Nunnally Duncan

I'm still a stranger in my town, not quite settled into a teaching job at the county high school, not yet accustomed to the ways of the local people. But I've noticed that there are a few individuals here who might be called *characters.* A man who lives next door to me, Manley Hawkins, falls into this category. I've noticed him practicing his peculiar hobby, which he explained to me one Sunday night as we sat together at the edge of his front yard.

"Some people think I'm foolish for being so partial to bats," he said. "But I don't know what I'd do if it wasn't for bats and the nights I spend watching them. You know, they're real entertaining, beat T.V. any time. But you can't tell that to some people. Take my wife, for instance. She'll always have some smart-aleck thing to say about me watching them. The other night she said, 'Manley, if you don't get in this house, I'm gonna call EMS to come pick you up. Get in here before somebody sees you. You ain't got no business sitting under that streetlight waiting for bats to fly. It don't make sense.' But Reba ain't sensitive at all. Couldn't expect her to understand. Other people are worse about it, though, like fellers at the plant.

"A few weeks ago I was sitting out here like tonight, and I heard a pick-up truck coming. I thought I recognized the sound of the motor, and I was right. Joe and Frank Johnson from my department. They drove on by

the house, and when they come back by, they stopped and blowed the horn. 'Wife kick you out?' Joe yelled and raced his engine. I told him I was watching for the bats, and that's when the joking started. Now everybody at work calls me *the bat man.* I don't guess that's so bad; you could be called worse. But I don't appreciate them laughing at me about it. They should have more respect; if not for me, for the bats.

"But I guess I'd have to say one reason I favor bats is because other people hate them. Why, I can't think of nobody else who feels like I do. I reckon it is unusual. But they make great pets; you couldn't ask for a cleaner animal."

I had to jump in here. "Manley," I said, "I've never heard of anybody keeping a bat as a pet--"

"Yeah," he said, "I caught me one one time. Kept it for a couple of weeks and then set it loose again. This is how it happened: I made me a bat-catcher by hooking a butterfly net to a long bamboo pole and sat here in my lawn chair and waited. When a bat flew out of them white pines over there, I lifted the pole and snatched it right out of the air as it swooped down on a giant Luna moth. I swung the pole down to the ground quick so the net covered the bat. I was shaking with excitement. With a glove on my hand, I put the bat in a little wire hamster cage and took it in the house. It looked pitiful in bright light. Such a furry little body and long, bony wings, not much meat to it at all. I'd heard they look like a mouse, but this one didn't. It reminded me right much of a tiny feisty dog I had once. Them oversized ears standing up, wild-like, and dark, shiny eyes, round as a penny.

"It got used to me after a few days. I fed it little bits of hamburger meat and moths. I'd never seen anything chew its food so fast or so careful-like before it swallowed. Seemed like it was always thirsty. When I put a medicine dropper full of water to the cage, it'd dart its tongue out and lap it fast. You should've seen it. I got real pleasure from watching that animal drink water. But I thought I'd better turn it loose. It started acting funny, wouldn't eat, just hung in its cage with its wings folded tight around its body, wouldn't even groom itself. That troubled me."

He studied his hands now, and didn't speak. I looked at him, trying to see his expression. It wasn't often he kept silent for this long. But the darkness and the streetlight with its pale illumination shadowed his face.

"I imagine it's happier free," he said after a while. "That might be it flying up there now. Igor--that's what I called it.

"You know, a lot of people are scared of bats. You notice I'm wearing a sweater with a hood? Well, I do so for a reason. I don't sit out here without my hood pulled up, no sir. Why, one night I almost had heart failure after a bat attacked me. I was walking into the back yard, heading for my workshop that's in a room at the rear of the house, and I heard a squeaking sound. I looked up and couldn't see for the dark. Then I felt something smack my head, and I run. It chased me, flapping at my hair, squealing like a demon. When I reached the room, I run in and slammed the door. I could hear it flying into the door, squealing louder than ever. I stood listening and shaking, too scared to leave the room. I stayed there till midnight, when I heard Reba pounding on the wall from inside the house. She come out to see why I'd stayed in my workshop so late and wouldn't believe my story.

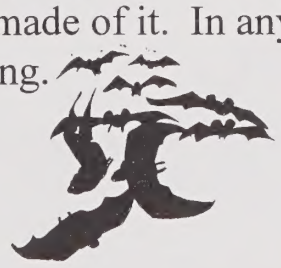
"That night she said, 'It's probably the one you trapped, trying to get even.' She never thought much of Igor. But this bat wasn't Igor. Igor liked me. I've not been attacked again, but I wear a hood just in case. Reba says bats are bad to carry rabies. But so are dogs.

"I like to think about bats while I'm working. I'll be rubbing stain on a piece of furniture, and all of a sudden, I'll see one zigzagging through the dusky sky, flitting around an old barn, or swooping at a moth in the moonlight. I wonder if the bats look down at me while I'm looking up at them. I wonder if Igor flies by."

"Hmm," I said to Manley, not knowing what to say, but I don't think he heard me.

"Don't know why," he said, "but it seems like I think about bats more all the time. I'll be honest with you: I don't know what I'd do without them."

That night after I left Manley's yard, I didn't know what to make of his tale. Maybe there was nothing to be made of it. In any case, he's out there tonight gazing at the streetlight, waiting.



Drawing by Richard Croom

Celtic Threads

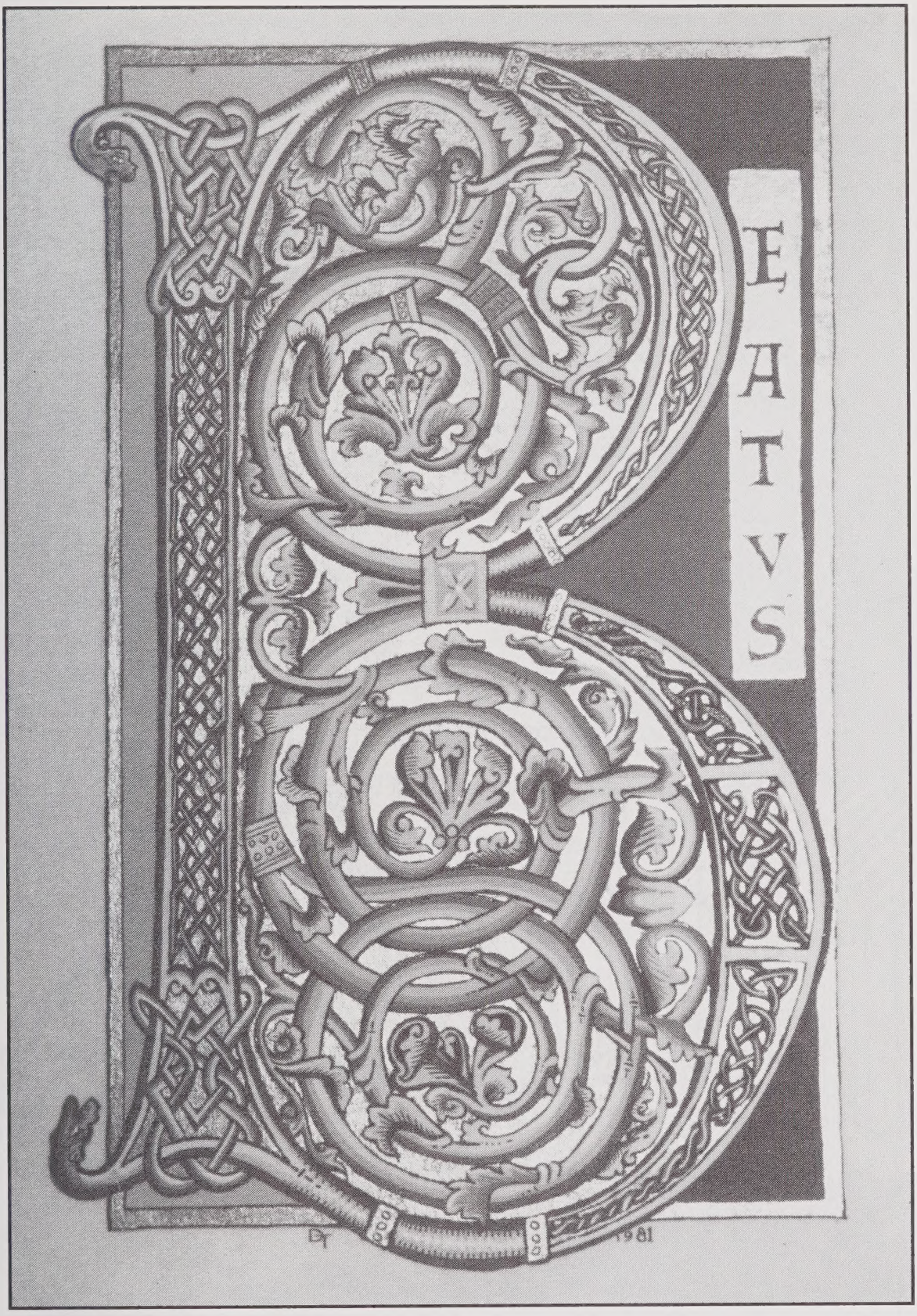
Bobbie Pell

Celtic threads
bind the body
to the land,
to the wind,
to the water
bringing life.

Celtic threads
bind the heart
to courage,
to faith,
to belief
in steadfast love.

Celtic threads
bind the soul
to mystery,
to passion,
to color-filled images
within us.

Feel the weaving.



Calligraphy by Derick Tickle

The Snow Reflects Light

Dean Presson

The snow reflects light
and even though the sun has gone down
and it's twilight,
The sky is more whitish clouds than darkness.
Thank goodness for snow!
In memory of lost snowy evenings,
It has brought a calm and
Stillness even while the wind blows cold.
I thought I forgot to feel this way,
Like a calm man of renewed faith in quiet nature.
There's no worry about rushing off to work tomorrow,
and the evening has just begun.

I still hope it stays awhile, the light snow
Becoming night, yet the calmness of sounds
Falling amid the cold evening and
No concern for tomorrow.

Woodcut by Shirley McLaughlin

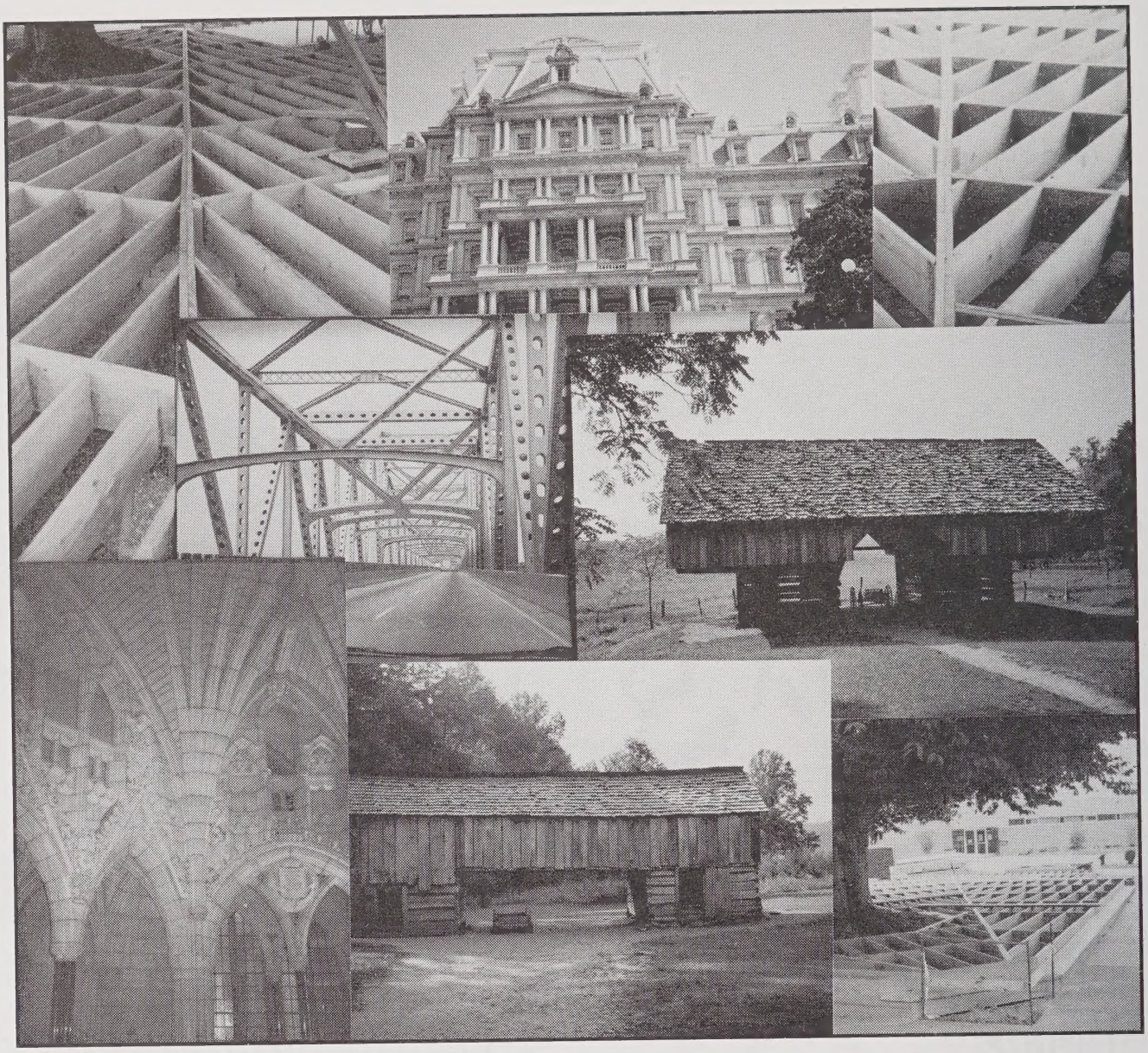


Photo collage by Nolan Darnell and Olin Wood

Saying Kaddish

Adrienne Hollifield

Our Western culture is preoccupied with time. We make appointments and are expected to keep them fairly exactly. Our concept of time is linear, consisting of a past, present, and future, with points marking specific events along the way. Therefore, it is somewhat disconcerting, in contemporary society, that the exact moment of birth and death cannot be calculated. It disrupts our schedules, our routines, and because families also tend to be spread out over larger distances, necessitating elaborate travel plans, we feel an even greater need to pin down an exact moment for these important events.

My mother took a very long time to die. For two years, I told each of my professors that my mother was terminally ill and I might have to leave school at any time. During the last year, we expected her to go several times, only to be fooled as she stared Death in the face one more time and said "Not yet." When you prepare for death enough times, you start to become unprepared--this must be the fire drill again. Since my mother lived in New York City and I live in North Carolina, I worried constantly that I would not recognize the signs of the end, so it became almost an obsession to try to decipher the implications each time another part of my mother's body started to decline.

On Wednesday, October 5, I called my mother's doctor to try to assess her condition and see if it was necessary for me to drop everything and leave for NY. He hesitated but said to wait; he would call me if things changed. Four days later, my mother called and said, "If you want to see me, come now." She had never asked me to come before, so I assumed that she knew more about when she was going to die than the doctor did. I booked a flight for the next day.

The limousine service took me from the airport straight to Montefiore Hospital. I had seen my mother just two months earlier, but I wasn't prepared for how she looked now. She was emaciated with enormous, hollowed out,

glassy eyes. Her hair had grown back after the radiation and chemotherapy, and it was soft and downy like a bird's. Actually, she looked a good bit like a fragile bird, and, as I hugged her gently, I remembered that I had often jokingly called her "a tough old bird."

The hospital is the common contemporary setting for death. Despite attempts in recent years to make it less imposing, it is still a largely impersonal environment. The dominant color in hospitals is white, perhaps as a talisman to chase off the evil specter of death. Tubes and machines add to the impersonality. My mother had an oxygen tube and a saline nebulizer mask for when she panicked at not being able to breathe. When she walked to the bathroom, we had to call for an oxygen tank and trail tubes and tank behind her. Later, when she could no longer walk, tubes were inserted to take care of her body's wastes.

My brother-in-law is a doctor at Montefiore Hospital, so I was allowed to be in my mother's room before visiting hours officially began at 12 noon. My shift was from 8 am to 6 pm. At 6:00, a health aide came to be with her for the night. Between 8 am and 12 pm, the various nurses and technicians that pricked and prodded my mother gave me quizzical looks, wondering what I was doing there. If anyone had challenged me, I would have told them I belonged there as much as they did, but no one openly questioned me.

On my first day at the hospital, I attempted to do some reading as I sat by my mother's bedside, but I soon realized this was impossible. She was too uncomfortable and kept me busy running to fetch things for her, helping her in and out of bed, and finding a nurse when needed. Mom had neither the energy nor the breath to speak much, so she began writing what she wanted to say in a spiral notebook. This book became a chronicle of her last days, and the words in it took on a poignancy that would have been lost if they had been spoken. Mom had spells during which she had great difficulty breathing. Her night aide helped her through these periods of panic by holding her hand and giving her something to hold on to. Here's how my mother explained it to me in her book:

> My little pillow--
> One night that I couldn't sleep--she gave me the pillow after I held her hand for a while--
> I clutched it and clutched my hands to help me relax.

In this terse prose, my mother communicated her fear, the compassion of the aide, and how attached she had become to a small, nondescript pillow.

Later that day, my brother-in-law and my mother's doctor came to talk to my mother about signing a DNR, a Do Not Resuscitate order. The DNR, the Health Care Proxy, and the Living Will are attempts to deal with the medical profession's ability to keep a body alive, often in pain, long after it is reasonable to do so. My brother-in-law attempted to outline for my mother, as clearly and compassionately as possible, what resuscitation means and when it is used to advantage. When the heart or breathing stops, resuscitation is used to restart those vital functions until the body resumes them on its own. For a healthy person, the mechanical ventilator takes over until the person can breathe on her own again. For an aged or diseased person, being put on a ventilator can cause much pain and various complications. It only prolongs the inevitable outcome, death. My mother was in the latter group, my brother-in-law said, and he advised her not to be resuscitated.

I never fully related to the Greek idea of the nobility of man in the face of his inevitable mortality until this particular moment. We all confronted our own death at that moment: my mother, my brother-in-law, and I. My brother-in-law sacrificed a great deal of himself to tell my mother that she was dying and to try to persuade her that she should not do everything possible to save her life. It is difficult enough for any doctor to say that to a patient, but much more so when that person is someone you love. That moment was as sweet and gentle and heroic as Hector's taking off his helmet and tenderly playing with his baby, in *The Iliad.*

Despite my brother-in-law's noble plea, my mother remained steadfast in her refusal to accept death easily. She wrote in her notebook, "Give me one more chance," meaning she did want to be resuscitated. Nothing my brother-in-law, her doctor, or I could say would change her mind; she was adamant. We all knew that my mother's decision was not in her best interests, but I feared we would be unable to do anything about it.

As Mom was drawn closer to death, little details, concrete details, became more important to her. She always wore her watch, which she looked at constantly, watching the hours, minutes, and seconds of her life tick away. Everything on her bedside table and in her area of the room had to be placed just so. Her life was out of her control, but the little things in it could still be manipulated. She kept me busy moving things around in different ways.

Nothing missed her notice. A song on the radio of the lady in the next bed caused her to write: "The name of that song is 'Going Home' by Dvorak." Details were all she had left to tie her to the world of the living--details and pain. She clung to both as she clung to life, with a fierce devotion. After the talk about the DNR, we were watching a news program on TV and my mother suddenly grabbed her notebook and wrote: "I will never find out what happened to OJ." I laughed and told her none of us would ever *really* know about OJ, but I understood that this represented all the living she was going to miss.

Sometime during the next day, my mother knew she was going to die soon. Earlier in the day she asked me not to go home that night, but, when it came time for me to leave, she changed her mind and let me go. Sure enough, Mom's blood pressure dropped during the night, and we rushed to the hospital to find her conscious but confused. Shortly after that, the doctors decided that she was in respiratory failure. Here was the moment I had dreaded. The resident on call was ready to put her on a ventilator. Another doctor intervened and asked us if we had discussed resuscitation. I desperately wanted her to die in peace, but what were we to do about her stated wishes to be resuscitated? Could we (or the doctors) in good conscience ignore them? Once again my brother-in-law came to the rescue. It seems that there are more aggressive methods of intervention and less aggressive ones. There is a manual means of putting air into the lungs which is considered resuscitation, but, if after a period of time the patient fails to breathe on her own, no further efforts are made to continue the procedure. This would be the "one more chance" my mother wanted. I cried with relief as my sister told the doctor what we wanted to do, and then cried because what I was relieved about was being able to allow my mother to die.

The doctors promised to keep my mother free of pain and as comfortable as possible until the end. She slipped into a coma shortly after the respiratory failure started, and all that was left to do was to wait. My sister and I sat by her bed and cried. Mom looked so peaceful though, sleeping and breathing slowly, that the tension caused by dealing with her fear and pain dissipated into a kind of relaxed calm. Over the next twelve hours, sitting around that bed, my sister and I reminisced and dealt with other relatives who came to visit. When my sister's family came that evening, including her two sons (aged 16 and 18), we brought up soup from the coffee shop and ate and laughed and joked and included my mother in the festivities one last time. In some ways, it seemed odd to be having a party there by the

bed of a dying woman; in other ways, it seemed the perfect response. Life was reasserting itself in the face of death.

My sister and I kept our vigil after everyone left. We were so tired we slept in our chairs with our heads on the bed. When Mom stopped breathing, the doctors and nurses rushed in to do the manual resuscitation process while my sister and I waited in another room. I prayed that it wouldn't work, that this ordeal would be over for her and us. My mother died on Friday, October 14, 1994, at 12:55 am, just a few hours after Allen Ginsberg read his poem "Kaddish" (which is the Jewish prayer for the dead) in UNCA's Lipinsky Auditorium.

My sister and I went back to the room to see Mom one more time. I was shocked at how she didn't look like the same person. I kept thinking there was a mistake; this was not my mother. I realized right then that the body is just a house for the soul--it is the soul that gives us life. My mother was really gone. While all this time I had been praying she'd die and be put out of her pain, all of a sudden I wanted her to breathe again. Even an unresponsive, sleeping mother was better than no mother at all. I wanted her back. I wanted her to demand something, to be annoying but TO BE ALIVE!

I have never before had someone that close to me die, nor have I ever actually seen anyone die. The images of this time swirl around in my head before I fall asleep, when I just wake up, when I daydream and when I'm supposed to be reading. I think of my brother-in-law crying as he talked to my mother, of my mother writing in her notebook, clutching her little pillow, looking fragile as she lay in a coma. I think of the doctors and nurses who are trained to do everything in their power to keep one alive, but who must restrain themselves to let you die. I think of my sister telling my mother good-bye when Mom decided she wouldn't make it through the night. I remember my 18-year-old nephew's grief, so overwhelming at his first big loss. I remember collapsing into tears as I looked at my son, Reuben, for I am his mother and looking at him made me acutely realize my loss.

While the process of dying may be different now than it was one hundred years ago, the grieving process must be the same. We all must go on with our busy lives, functioning in our everyday routines. I have slipped back into my life and truly have good and happy moments, but another part of me aches and knows that I will never be the same.

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***Victoria Press* continues to include contributions from neighboring community colleges and from established writers with local ties. We thank each contributor and especially poet and novelist Fred Chappell.**

Woodcut by Shirley McLaughlin